

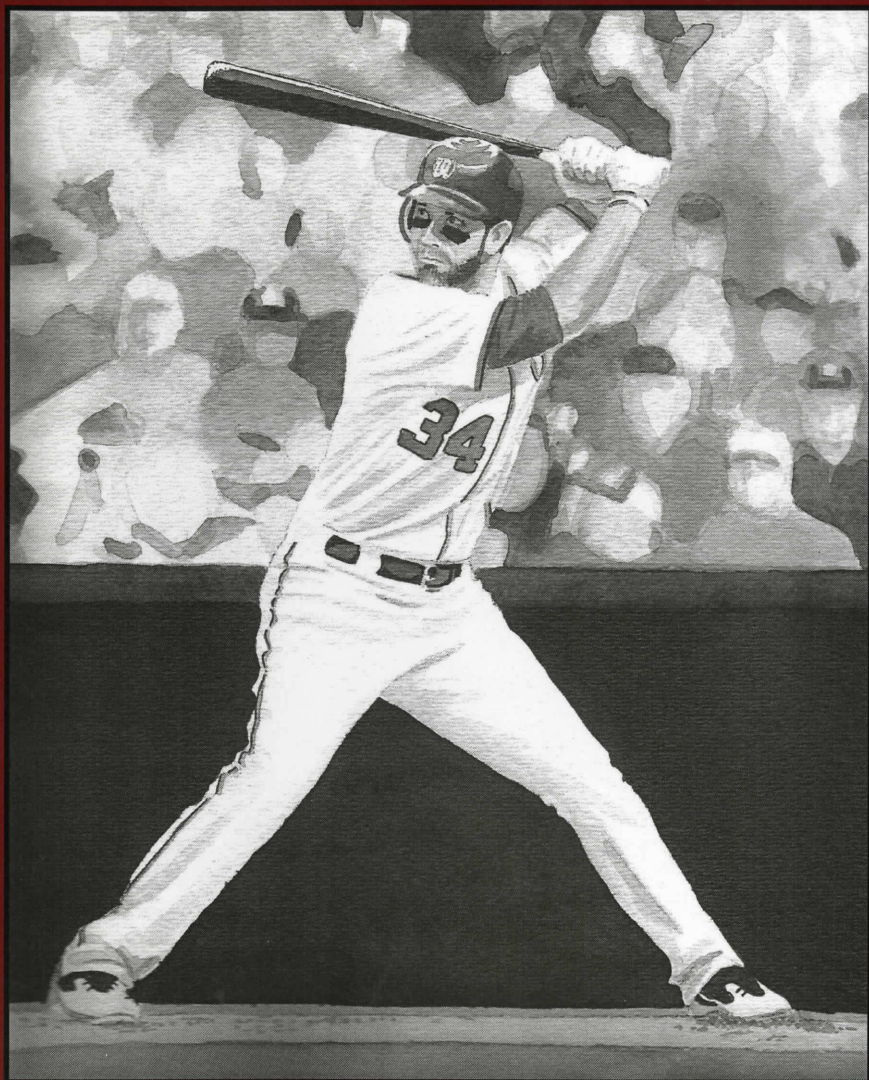


SPITBALL

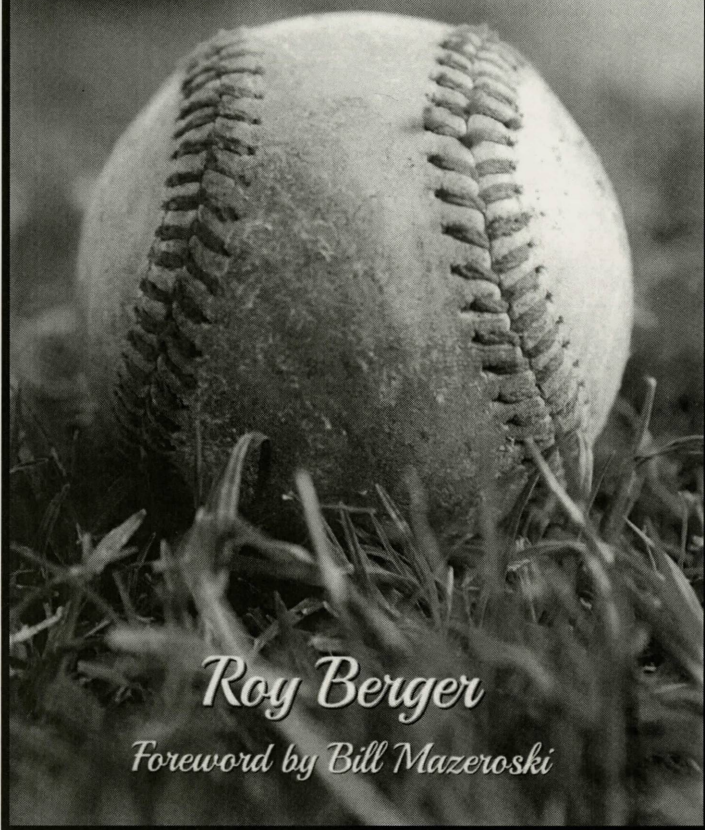
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SPITBALL

Spring 2014 No.74

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The Spitball Interview



Herschel Cobb

Herschel Roswell Cobb was born December 29, 1942, in Twin Falls, Idaho, the second child of Ty Cobb's third child, Herschel Roswell Cobb, Sr. Herschel was the middle name of Ty Cobb's father, William Herschel Cobb, a respected school teacher and state senator in middle Georgia. During a childhood made extremely difficult by the abuse and indifference of his parents, Herschel, along with his older sister (Susan) and younger brother (Kit), also resided in Los Angeles and Santa Maria, California. With the help of a bequest left to him by his beloved grandfather, Herschel graduated with a B.A. in economics and political science from Occidental College (Los Angeles) in 1965; and in 1968 he took a law degree from the University of California School of Law in Berkeley. He is married to the former Lyn Jason, and the couple has two grown children: a daughter named Madelyn and a son named Ty Cobb; both of whom are accomplished athletes. A Principal of Vendome Capital, LLC, Herschel published a memoir of his life with his famous grandfather, *The Heart of a Tiger* (ECW Press), which won the 2013 CASEY Award. (This interview was conducted via email in April and May 2014.)

Mike Shannon: You briefly cover this in the Preface, but for those who have not yet read the book would you tell us how you came to write it?

Herschel Cobb: When our daughter, Madelyn was 12 or 13 years old, we were looking at pictures of her as a little girl and recalling the fun times caught in those photos. Out of the blue, she asked, "Dad, tell me a story about when you were a little boy." I was stunned into silence and bewilderment at what to say. I could not think of one single time with my father or mother that was not filled with terror, fear, or fright. While I sat silent, a recollection of being at Lake Tahoe with my grandfather at his cabin jumped forth, and I told her about a time when I scared my sister, Susan, by putting a bear rug over me (the bear head was part of the rug), and nudging her arm while she was taking a nap on the sofa in the grand room. She woke up with a wild start, screamed, then saw it was me, and



Photo: Craig J. Orosz

chased me out of the cabin. I laughed and laughed, but she didn't! Susan never forgot this time, and all our lives she scolded me whenever we talked about it. Well, Madelyn laughed and wanted to hear other stories, so I told her more. Being with my grandfather at Lake Tahoe or at his home in Atherton, California, was always satisfying in many ways. His sense of humor shone, his wisdom shone, his guidance was present, his affection, especially toward Susan, was manifest.

My wife, Lyn, heard the laughter from me and Madelyn and suggested I write down some of these stories so they wouldn't be forgotten. I did and enjoyed the process of remembering and reliving my times with my grandfather. He was important to me, and I'd never really wanted to share this with others for fear he'd be diminished in some way. These were my personal stories, my personal connection with the man who helped me grow up. Telling them to my children was entirely different, as if I were passing "goodness" down to them. After a while, I realized that there was a life story, my story with my grandfather, buried in my memory. I undertook to add the part about my life with my parents. That was difficult to relive. Remembering was easy, as the scars had never had a chance to heal. But writing it down was very emotional for me, realizing what happened to me, what happened to Susan and my brother. My mother was filled with envy and venom, and my father was angry and unhappy. Their emotional darkness filled our house; they vented at will, and we children were constant targets of their outbursts.

MS: We've been told that your agent thought you would need a ghost writer but that you refused to use one. Would you comment on this and on the writing process?

HC: My agent, Jake Elwell, has been very supportive of me throughout this process. At one point, he offered the idea that a co-writer might make it easier for me to be open about certain parts of my childhood and add a professional touch to describing Ty Cobb. Jake left it entirely up to me. I talked to a person who was suggested and realized quickly that my personal memories, feelings, recollections of conversations, physical details, my own growing process, and seeing my grandfather grow into realizing his effect on his children and desire to redeem himself with his grandchildren, a second chance so to speak, could not be told by a stranger. Of course, this meant I had to do a lot of re-writing, re-living, and re-remembering many times and instances that gave me nightmares and heartbreak. No one really wants to re-live such things and thus realize that their parents could actually do such things. In re-writing, I lived through these times again and again. Painful at the time, but now it has served to somehow start a cleansing process and, to my surprise, forge forgiveness on the fringe of my emotional base that seems to ease into me more and more as time passes. I think that my best being knew this at the time a ghost writer was suggested ... knew that my path was through the swamp of my childhood, into a better lighted place.

I did most of my writing in the very late afternoons and early evenings. My memory is visual, and I easily recalled the details of my grandfather's cabin at Lake Tahoe or his home in Atherton. I was really a chronicler, rather than a writer. My grandfather had a great presence about him. You knew he was in the room, even if he sat quietly, watching. He had a sharp eye and mind, took everything in, and seemed to know when to use it. He was also very confident, and that was something I noticed and longed for. Once or twice, I tried to write in the early morning, but that did not work. Worse, it felt like work. Writing in the early evening, for about two or three hours before dinner, suited my body and mind. Also, I felt entirely entitled to have a glass of wine with Lyn after spending time with memories of my parents!

MS: We get the sense that the horrible childhood you and your siblings endured was even worse than what you admit to in the book. Which was worse, the physical abuse inflicted by your father, Herschel, or the emotional abuse of your mother, Marge?

HC: In the early drafts of my book, my childhood descriptions take three chapters. It was suggested to me, and rightly so, that this was too much. It was. I have that draft packed away, not forgotten, but where it belongs. The instances with my father that I included were ones that impacted me. He was scary. Six feet and three hundred pounds, amateur boxer, had 30 or so rifles and pistols, drank and ate without restraint, consumed much in his

33 years. His rage was on the surface. Peculiar to say, but to the men who worked for him, his excesses had an endearing quality, as if a misguided, self-destructive clown was jovially leading the party.

The effect on me has been that trust of other people, especially men, is difficult. This has modulated over the years, for which I'm grateful because I like my buddies. My mother, Marjorie, was attractive. In high school she died her hair platinum blond, hoping to be noticed as a movie star. She loved the glamour of Los Angeles in the 1930s and 1940s. However, she never made much of herself. Somewhere along the line, she self-embodied resentment of almost everybody, envy of anybody who achieved, and venom towards those whom she felt didn't treat her right. By the time of her passing, she had purposefully written off every one of her friends from all phases of her life. When I left for college, age 18, I never looked back and never had anything to do with her again. My sister lived in the same town as my mother; and until my mother's death, she demanded that Susan fix her a full meal and deliver it to her house three times a week. My sister complied. I can only guess at the underlying, desperate need Susan had for some sign of affection from her mom. That was never to be. Susan was the sole person at her funeral.

When I was a sophomore in high school, part of the Civics class, taught by Mr. Pearlman, was about personalities/psychology. His method was to handwrite the lesson on the chalk board while we students copied it word for word in our notebooks. One class session, he wrote down, "By the age of 14 years or so, your personality is set; that is the personality you will have all your life." Scared the shit out of me. I did not like the personality I had absorbed from being around my mother -petty, fault-finding, critical, hard to accept people for themselves, and that kind of stuff. I knew I wanted different, very different, but had no idea how to move my insides. I feared that I was stuck in this imitation of a parent and that it would corrupt and ruin my life forever. Combine that with a difficulty in trusting others, and I knew I was in a mess. What I later referred to as the "swamp." Filled with nasty stuff below the surface. One's subconscious is very powerful and ever present. I have been determined, and it's taken years and years to open the trap door, peer inside, and assemble myself for slowly changing. Yes, my mother is ever present, more difficult.

I've always been careful of resentment. It's unconscious and insidious, like an infection. I was lucky to have children later in life. If marriage and children had come earlier, I would have had difficulty creating a forgiving, unconditional, non-demanding atmosphere outside of myself. What happens inside of me, I work on constantly.

MS: It seems a bit implausible to some readers that for a long time you were not aware of how great a baseball star your grandfather had been ... and that when he did try to convey that reality to you he did so indirectly (having you help him respond to autograph requests through the mail) and

only after you had experienced some hostility while playing Little League baseball. Would you explain why you found yourself in that position?

HC: I don't argue with whatever people choose to believe. That's their stuff. I'll relate my circumstances, and maybe your readers will get a better understanding. When I was a boy, we lived in Santa Maria, California, which was a small, agricultural community along the central coast of California, population about 20,000. Our house was about two blocks from the edge of town, and across that road was a huge strawberry farm owned by the Enos family. My mother used a lot of pills –uppers and downers– and periodically became addicted. Dr. Dunn would come to our house, give her sedatives, and lock her in her bedroom. I mention one of these times in my book. She drank at night, usually a quart of Old Crow in the form of Manhattans. Very few people visited our house. I think I relate in my book that my grandfather intensely disliked my mother, and she despised him, mainly for not giving her money after my father died. She never talked about him, and we did not have any baseball items in our house. During summer vacation, my sister, my brother, and I visited my grandmother in Menlo Park and Portola Valley, California. My grandmother made sure we visited granddaddy during the summer. My mother was left out of this aspect of our time at grandma's. At the time, the mid-1950s, neither the Dodgers nor the Giants had moved to the West Coast, so baseball was a long way away. I had my favorites –Mickey Mantle and Whitey Ford, Hank Aaron and Warren Spahn, and, of course, Sandy Koufax. I watched Koufax every chance I had. Usually I went down the block to the Lawrence's home to watch TV. Mr. Lawrence was an officer with the west coast YMCA, and both his sons played basketball, which was my favorite sport. Baseball was on TV, but it was not a big part of our lives. As far as I remember, talk about big baseball salaries, memorabilia values, the rarity of autographs, and the effect of television and media on sports was a long way from the 1950s. I think I mention that I knew my grandfather played baseball, but I had scant awareness of his stature in the game. I remember once in the 6th grade at Miller Street School telling a fellow that my grandfather had played baseball, and he told me I was a crazy liar. That was weird. When Middle League Baseball came around, not Little League, that was with real spikes, a regulation diamond, hard throwing, and rising hopes and dreams on the part of grownups watching their sons. That was when I was heckled and knew I had to ask my grandfather directly about himself. When I did ask him, he knew it was time to fill me in about his career.

MS: Ty Cobb's decision not to identify himself to neighbors around Lake Tahoe is a clear demonstration of his having learned the potentially destructive power of fame and heightened expectations. Would you comment on this?

HC: Ty Cobb was a smart, intellectually fast guy. He was determined and

had a strong will, and, most importantly, he was master of his own will. He was able to learn from his experiences, and then apply his intelligence to those experiences. He may have been the first ballplayer who truly understood psychology in the battle to score runs. The first time he slid into second base headfirst, the second baseman stomped him on the back of the neck, pushed his face in the dirt, taking the skin off his nose, cheeks, and chin. He never made that slide again. He also knew the effect his fame, notoriety, and money had on his own children. The effect was disastrous. My dad and Uncle Ty were spoiled, recalcitrant, and, in a certain way and time, a bit lost. My dad finished at New Mexico Military Academy, mainly so he'd have some disciplined structure. As I mention in my book, the estrangement never had a chance to heal. They both died young. So my grandfather was very aware that his sons had had a hard time having the shadow of Ty Cobb, World's Best (and Richest) Baseball Player, hovering over them night and day. He was not going to make the same mistake again.

MS: John Popovich of Channel 9 here in Cincinnati asked you a great question on his "Sports of All Sorts" show that aired after the 11:00 news on the night of the CASEY Banquet, and I'd like to re-ask it phrased just a bit differently: Did Ty Cobb benefit from your relationship as much as you benefited from it?

HC: We're looking back in time to answer this question. My advantage is my grandmother, who I know made sure we saw granddaddy every visit. In the mid-1950s, Cobb was but a few years from July 17, 1961, the date of his death. The maladies that plagued him were painful, both physically and emotionally. His heart was bad, and he suffered from high blood pressure, diabetes, creeping cancer, and a body that had endured 24 years supporting the fierce battles on the diamond. As a result, sometimes he wasn't at his best. I heard from Aunt Shirley "The Old Man is on a tear" more than once. However, grandma would get word to him that she had us grandchildren for the summer, and by gum, soon enough he was "In good shape." I suppose the prospect of seeing his granddaughter's strawberry blond curls and hearing about my reading adventures and Kit's too short tee shirts had something to do with it. He just loved Susan, and when I say in my book that he'd do anything for her, he would. At night, at the Lake Tahoe cabin, my eyes would drift and close, and they'd still be talking and laughing. I loved being lifted up, carried to my bed, and feeling my forehead being softly stroked. So, yes, he benefited, especially as to my sister.

MS: If Ty Cobb is the obvious hero of *Heart of a Tiger*, would it be fair to say that Charlie Cobb, his estranged wife, is the unsung hero?

HC: My grandmother loved Ty Cobb throughout her entire life. I think I mention in my book how she would dress as if going to a lovely garden party when she drove me to his home. She often talked of their youth in

Georgia and Detroit, with this picture in her mind: "Your granddaddy was handsome and daring and loved baseball." Indeed, she was a hero behind the hero. She loved her grandchildren, probably unconditionally. I am sure she realized how much I derived from seeing my grandfather and being in his presence.

MS: Al Stump's "reporting" on Ty Cobb has pretty much been discredited now. Was his the worst mischaracterization of Cobb you've seen in print, or have you read others just as bad?

HC: Stump's characterizations of Cobb in his 1994 book were bad but have been mostly discredited or recognized as sensationalized accounts. It's no accident that Ron Shelton wrote the screenplay for the movie the same year. The first scene, which lays the framework and purports to take place at Cobb's cabin near Cave Rock on the Nevada side of Lake Tahoe, could easily have been inserted as the first chapter of Stump's book. It's full of factual errors about Lake Tahoe and the physical and functional aspects of the cabin there and mischaracterizations that only work for a movie. From the time of its release, the movie became an urban myth and took on a life of its own. Popular myths can obfuscate, exaggerate, and transform any truth. They also stick, because they're simple and easy to grab hold of. So the movie did as much as or more damage than Stump's book. These treatments also ignore a lot of the positives about Ty Cobb. Namely, that during his baseball playing days, Cobb was the most noticeable baseball player in either league and the highest paid player from 1913 to 1920. He was very fiery and exciting, and he never backed down. He negotiated his own contracts and helped other players negotiate theirs; he regularly urged them to save and invest for their retirement from baseball; and he was always willing to share his knowledge of hitting. In fact, when he managed the Tigers, the team batting average improved by 20 points.

MS: With the help of your famous grandfather, you have had a very successful life. How have your older sister, Susan, and your younger brother, Kip, turned out?

HC: My sister, Susan, passed away in 2010. I mentioned previously, she lived her entire life in Santa Maria, not far from my mother. She continued to wait on my mother her whole life, perhaps unconsciously hoping for a morsel of acceptance or love. My brother, Kit (Christopher Paul. In part named after Ty's brother, Paul Cobb), lives by himself and manages to make ends meet. As for me, by some path of fate, I always wanted to know what my grandfather was reading when I walked through his home and saw open books everywhere. I admired his bookshelf, liked listening to him read aloud, and felt comfortably challenged by his prods to tell him every detail of the books I read. School was my refuge from my mother, my grades were a reward, and to my surprise, they added up to my opportunity to be accepted by colleges. My grandfather provided the means. As

I have said, I am very fortunate.

MS: *Heart of a Tiger* has obviously struck a nerve with the reading public. Did you anticipate this, and would you summarize its impact?

HC: I agree with many who have written books, that once published and in the public domain, what is written will find meaning by those it touches. For me, personally, it's been surprising and heartwarming how many people have told me that my story touched a part of them that recalls their own story, which turns out to be similar to mine. Men have told me they haven't thought about these feelings in years and thought they were the only one who endured such a childhood, and they thank me for opening up and telling my story. These conversations have added immensely to the richness of my laboring many evenings, spilling out my recollections of my parents' antics; and now I sense the healing beginning to take hold in myself, and perhaps, in others as well.

MS: Do you still have that first note, saying "Remember, Herschel, I love you," from your grandfather that was written in his trademark green ink? And does your own penchant for signing books in green ink stem from that note?

HC: No, I don't have that note. I wish I did. Cobb mostly signed in his trademark green ink with a Parker 51 fountain pen. He gave me one of his pens, and I've used green ink in it since college. All the items he signed for me are signed in green ink, so I wanted to carry forward his way to connect vividly with the past.

MS: After reading your book, I think that from now on every time I eat ice cream I'll think of Ty Cobb. Do you think of him when you dig into a carton of Breyer's?

HC: I think of him when I have ice cream, when I go to Lake Tahoe or almost anywhere in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, when I drive to Atherton to 48 Spencer Lane, when I see children playing, and when I look over my own life and realize how fortunate I've been. In closing, I want to thank *Spitball Magazine*, its Editors and staff, and the Judges of the 2013 CASEY Award for selecting and honoring my book; it's been a privilege to give this interview, and I thank all the fans of *Spitball* for taking the time to read it and enjoy your magazine.

Michael Dewey

Doctor Fausto

“Little pterodactyls”

Casey Blake later called them
insect repellent only attracted the hordes
on that distinctive night of instinct
game two, Twenty-aught-seven playoffs
when the midges appeared en masse
the latest Lake Erie affliction
a blight under the Cleveland lights
as if the baseball gods heard the Tribal curse
“a pox upon those Yanks!”

Joba Chamberlain
heralded rookie reliever
heretofore unhittable
until that eighth inning so endless
a moment frozen in frustration
a Big Leaguer beleaguered
vexed and perplexed by the pestilence
control turned turbulent
by the tempest of wings
damn pesky flying things
those “Canadian soldiers”
a natural abnormality
induced just enough wildness
to unravel Pettitte’s masterpiece
meanwhile the drumming from the bleachers
always the drumming

Fausto Carmona
gem dealer in his post-season debut
hurling nine carats of brilliance
undaunted and undeterred on the diamond
immune to the infestation
stopping time with his stamina
I watched, mouth agape (catching flies?)
the tenacity of a man staring down a plague
the swarm in a swirl
my thoughts lost in the thicket of thoraxes
the maelstrom of mandibles
of perspiration and respiration
mound presence

a beast, in the best sense
pitching up his own plague of deception and speed
ah, the ferocity of the young!

later learned of his deal with Mephistopheles
for a fake birth certificate
a faster ticket out of Dominican destitution
fudging the figures
blurring the bottom line and the baseline
ah, the audacity of the desperate!
even still the power of memory compels me
and I cannot look away
Jeter and ARod stripped of their powers
lost in the clouds of aerosol fog
Doctor Fausto
sucking in midges by the lungful
exhaling dragon fire
mowing down pinstripes with a machete
conjuring up some dark magic
dangling his soul out in murky waters
like chum for great white sharks
as October breathed deeply

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Brushes with Baseball



Steve Spencer

Multi-million dollar contracts. Multi-billion dollar television rights negotiations. Performance-enhancing drug scandals that never end. Kids, chasing college scholarships and draft-day bonuses, convinced to train year-round – starting with T-ball. World Series games that don't start before 9:30 pm in November.

Does anyone remember that baseball is supposed to be FUN?

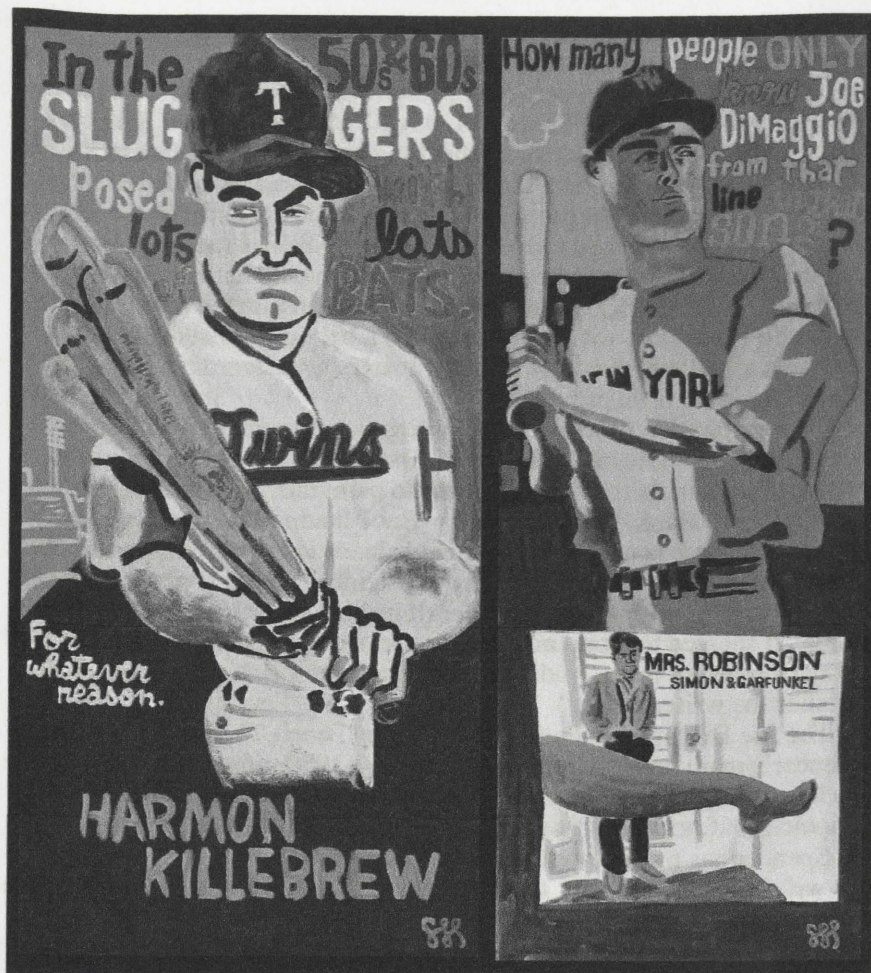
Enter Arkansas artist Steve Spencer, a witty, jovial man who readily admits that his “#1 priority is to make art that pops with fun, that brings an obvious smile to your face, the same kind of fun I had as a kid just being with my dad at an Atlanta Crackers game.”

With a boisterous, vivid, intensely colored and colorful style bursting with the naiveté and charm of the folk art tradition, Spencer's art incorporates all the influences and talents of a life lived with rich variety.

“I was universally recognized as the best drawer in my kindergarten class,” Spencer laughs, “and that kind of praise and attention became kind of a feedback loop growing up. My dad played minor league ball in the Braves system, so baseball was in my blood, and besides, that's what you DID where I grew up. I actually made the University of Arkansas junior varsity for one semester, but it became obvious that I needed to stick with school instead. Got a degree in Public Administration, an MBA from SMU, and became a Wall Street investor in New York City in the 1980's.

“What a fantastic, hectic, crazy-great life experience that was,” he continues, “wearing suits with big, padded shoulders and frequenting all those glorious art museums. I gravitated toward friends in the publishing industry, and eventually made enough money to fulfill a dream to attend film school at the University of Southern California. And that's where storyboarding really pulled me back into drawing.”

Admiring the work of masters like Matisse and Lichtenstein, immersed in abstract impressionism, pop art, and the modern art movement,



Spencer stretched away from the sterility of computer-generated art – “I felt like a trained monkey” – and embraced the organic possibilities of outsider painting.

“I decided to approach it with the idea that I didn’t know anything about painting at all,” he recalls. “I used the paints you get from the hobby store and a single brush, which forced me to use composition and color choices in unique ways. I did a lot of caricature drawing in my film work, but I wanted to stay away from straight caricature. I wanted a likeness, but to keep the image purposefully awkward, I worked quickly. The result is not really cubist, but more Egyptian, or ancient. I want it to look like Hank Aaron, but not a distorted rendering of his likeness.”

And a style was born. But the singular feature of most of Spencer’s portfolio of music, baseball, New York landmark, and food paintings is

the whimsical, yet forceful incorporation of cultural references infused in phrase form directly onto the canvas.

It's a lot like stand-up comedy in acrylics.

A perfect example is "Lots and Lots of Bats" the Harmon Killebrew painting that Spencer describes in his blog at www.spinadelic.com:

"I based Harmon on a black and white photo and really enjoyed cooking up a really light purple-blue-gray for the uniform. And even though I tell my wife and kids this ALL THE TIME, I (admit) I forgot that the "Twins" on the jersey means that this would actually have been the team's WHITE HOME uniform. But Harmon must've been in the shade. So I just went with it. And I added a bat, just to make my point."

When asked which comes first, the image or the words, Spencer concludes that it's a little of both.

"The inspiration process for a painting is pretty random," he says. "I have a sketchbook handy at all times, and there's always four times as many subjects in there as there is time to paint them all. Heck, I can't paint my hero Hank Aaron every day. But I'll admit that the biggest challenge for me is to find that perfect balance in my painting. I use color quite a bit as a balance element, but I remember painting words that inspired a piece simply because I felt it needed something to balance the image. It seemed to work, and people seemed to like it, so I haven't shied away from using them. And if I can be successful in being a bit clever, it satisfies the writer in me."

The Joe DiMaggio painting "How Many People?" clearly places Spencer's main reference frame in the 1960-1980 range and stirs together his love of music and baseball icons with a bold color palette and funky graphic motif, topped off by a heavy dollop of irony.

Spencer has moved back to his beloved Little Rock, Arkansas, with his wife Angie, 9-year-old son Sam, and 6-year-old daughter Abby, where he works as a political advertisement producer.

"I always have a couple paintings going at any one time," he explains. "When it's election season, I may not pick up a brush for long stretches, but it doesn't take much to get me going again when I have the space in my schedule. But I will tell you this: when it gets to be spring training time, I feel myself getting drawn into ideas, and things just aren't right unless I'm working on a baseball painting. For me, it's a part of the feeling of summer." For more information on Steve Spencer's art, visit www.spinadelic.com. And be prepared to smile.

(Mark Schraf)

Robert L. Harrison

A Bukowski Baseball Poem

I took the bitch
to a doubleheader
just so I could see her
stretch in the seventh inning.

She liked the way
they made the hot dogs
and tossed away the bread
while eating them
in front of her new fans.

She liked how the players
scratched themselves
and all that fanny slapping
in the dugout.

I left the bitch
after she had too many beers
and was rooting for each side
to win the game.

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Exit Chucker

He shouldn't have been thinking about golf. Not that there was anything wrong with the old Scottish game, quite the contrary. The unfettered flight of the dimpled ball, the way it bound, joyously, toward the green, the slight smacking sound when it fell into the waiting cup. Such a sweet sight! But not here. Not now. The red-ribbed ball ready in his palm. Him upon the hill, nearer the heavens, surrounded by a rapt audience, all eagerness and anticipation.

Chuck it in there, Chucker, chuck it in.

Humm, baby, humm, baby, humm.

The infielders' chatter like angel songs, like the choir he once led, his voice rising above the others like eagles above scavenger crows, circling in the mastery of flight, the effortless gyrations of the gifted, the aeronautical, the winged.

He tossed the orb in his palm, spun the red threads this way, then that, and dug his nail into the white flesh of the ball, drawing it back slowly behind his head even as his leg thrust suddenly forward and down, pulling the torso and head behind like ribbons behind a dancer, his right shoulder following, right arm trailing, and lastly, most swiftly and lethal of all, his right hand, spinning now and snapping violently as the globe jumped into the air, free and flying of its own accord at last, floating up, darting down, a snake of the sky slithering left and right simultaneously until at last, exhausted and spent, it fell out of orbit and into the soft cowhide of the catcher.

Plop.

"No," said the ump, flicking his index finger over the counter in his hand even as the first light on the green board in right field lit beneath the four letter word, "Ball."

Ball? Chucker wondered. Well, yes, it's a ball, that's fucking obvious. But ball, as in not a strike, not in there, not perfect? Really? How could you?

The catcher stood in his field of rye, rescuing Chucker on every pitch, saving the white orb from death on the grass or, greater catastrophe, the ignominy of the back screen. He stood, catcher, Colossus, legs wide, thighs the size of tree trunks, a saver of bad pitches, savior of poor pitchers, old stanchion, old reliable, a veritable backstop in mask and pads. He returned each errant toss to its tosser, pitch to pitcher, ball to ballster, orb to the orb master, chucked back to his Chucker a hand-sized globe to a very human-sized Atlas.

Chucker tossed the ball in his hand.

Here you are again, he said to the ball. Undamaged. Untarnished. Untouched. You sneer at the great leering batsman, duck beneath his

vicious swipe and leave him twisting in the humble air. From hand to mitt you travel, and back again, in the ancient ritual of pitch-and-catch. A game for fathers and sons.

But isn't it usually the son who pitches to the father? Apprentice to mentor? Novice to veteran?

Chucker pulled the gray hairs of his beard, looked down the three score feet between his hillock and the demarcated flatlands where waited a trinity of earthly men: a beardless one who would crush the poor defenseless ball with his cudgel; a teammate—not Chucker's age, but shaving daily—who would swaddle that ball in his hide-cushioned hands; and the ancient arbiter—older even than Chucker!—who has determined that you, ball, were a "Ball." Return unto him and earn the glory of his gruffly barked "Strike," Chucker silently commanded the orb.

Become a strike by refusing to be struck.

Chucker smiled at the irony, and at the memory of another hurler, a Fidrychy Big Bird that once hopped about the mound talking to the sphere in his hands. Chucker wondered what incantations the Bird had spoken to the orb.

You are no mere ball, no, but rather an entire world of balls and bats contained within your horsehide sheath. I hold your continents, limned in red, and like the Greek Peltasts hurl you into the enemy's roundhouse to suffer such indignities there that you should flee to the remotest vacancies of this stadium-sized universe. This we know to happen. All too often. Runners romping round the bases. The hungry hordes screaming open-mouthed for more.

But Chucker knew the ball already knew what to do, no need exhortation or exclamation. He and the ball were simpatico. Not like that damn golf ball which seemed to have a mind of its own and wings to wend where e'er it wished, a flight path only the bird itself knew.

Chuck it in there, Chucker, chuck it in.

Humm, baby, humm, baby, humm.

The background chatter returned him to the game played inside the foul lines—no balls in the rough here. He wound again, twisting first away from the pugilist and his wooden weapon, then suddenly dipping back toward the very thing he wished to avoid, arm unfurling like a flag behind him and snapping suddenly in the solar wind, a great flashing of leg and arm and hat and eyes and, finally, hand—but where is the desired object? The great white hope? The red-ribbed ball itself?

There it is!

Appearing above Chucker's head, suspended as if by strings, then darting down below the knees as if to submarine its way to port, then rising and floating as invitingly as a frisbee on a summer's breeze, before dropping like a stone toward the earth and settling, harmlessly and unharmed, into the welcoming web of the gloved hand.

"Whoosh," the air was rent as the great batterer of balls unleashed

himself Casey-like upon the empty sky, twisting in a tight corkscrew of frustration.

"One," mumbled the man in blue, as casually as you may, pointing a finger to his right just before the first light on the green board lit beneath "Strike."

And the round world returned to Chucker once more. He greeted the sphere with smiles and approbation, nods and gratification. Ball, we have to keep meeting like this, he thought.

Well, folks, I gotta say, as we head into the seventh inning, that this is more like it, yessir. The sun has emerged, the sky has cleared, the band's playing out in the right field bleachers, and all over the stadium hearts are light—and, why shouldn't they be? It's only spring training, friends, when every team looks like a winner ... or believes it can be a winner. Yessir. In spring, anything is possible, any dream can come true. And speaking of dreams, here comes a player—can't call him a boy anymore, nossir—No. 63, right handed reliever Chucker Pote. He's held onto his dream longer than most, oh my, for nearly ... well, let me add it up for you. Press packet says he's ... hold on now. That can't be. Nossir, nobody that old has pitched in the majors since, well, since the incomparable and entirely unbelievable Satchel Paige, now of the Hall of Fame. Yessiree, friends, when I say Ol' Satch was un-believable, I mean every word I say. You couldn't believe a single thing came out of Satchel's mouth, nossir, a born teller of tall tales was he. Claimed to be 49 when he finally pitched in the Big Time, but by gosh and by golly, he may have been fudging that just a wee bit, yessir. Looked sixty at least ... pitched like he was twenty. Holy smokin' barbecue! That Satchel was something to see, yesssiree! ... What is it ol' Satch used to say? "Don't look back, somethin's gainin' on ya!" Got that right. ... And here we go, top of the seventh, Chucker Pote on in relief, right hander trying to make the team, the Big League team, just one last time in his storied career, for one final summer of glory, oh my my my ... Gotta admire a fella that clings to a dream like that, yessir.

Chucker sat. He breathed. Slowly. Deeply. Like a man. Who'd just climbed down. From Everest. Though his was only a tiny hill. Still. He panted for air. Always surprised at how tired. How out of. Breath. He was.

He sweated. Just one short inning and still. He mopped his brow. Here in the dugout, doubt returned. Like an itch he couldn't scratch. A voice he couldn't silence. The breath he couldn't catch.

Am I too old?

Survived, didn't I? A scoreless seventh, not bad. But, he panted, there's always a *but* ...

Chucker sat at the end of the bench. Alone. Dugout rituals. Baseball customs. Don't talk to the pitcher between innings. And if you were

throwing a no-no ... as if you didn't exist. Chucker had never thrown a no-no, never even flirted with one. Lucky to throw a single hitless inning. This had not been that. This had been near disaster. Averted.

He hung his head. Took deep breaths. Wiped the back of his neck.

The question echoed in his brain: Am I? He knew by heart the answer to the twin question, Why? He'd been asked so many times. By press, by management, even some of the players. Why a comeback at your age? What makes this game so important you torture your body, inconvenience your family, risk your financial future all for a few innings in the Bigs?

Because I love it. Because I dream it. Because I want to experience it one more time. Want to memorize it. If what follows is a long, leisurely retirement, feet up, head back, drifting in and out of the lazy afternoon nap of the elderly—if that's what tomorrow holds, then I want to memorize today. Feel of the ball, sound of the bat, ache of defeat and thrill of one more win. I want all that, once more, so I can't forget it, etched in my brain so deeply I can taste the adrenalin on my tongue, smell the horsehide, feel the breeze of ball and arm as they fall through the descending arc of delivery, and watch—one last time, please—the sudden surprising smack of strike three, dust flying from the catcher's mitt and the look, oh that bewildered look of disbelief, in the eyes of the batter when the man in blue cries to the heavens, "Yer out!"

Because of that, Chucker sits.

Because of that, he endures the resentful glances of young teammates, the skeptical looks of coaches, the mocking eyes of the young batsmen who parade up to the plate with plans to deliver this old man from his fantasy of playing one more year and send him packing, send him back to the minors, to the semi-pro leagues, to the bench, finally, even, to the numbered seats on the other side of the fence. Demote the old fart to mere spectator.

The question echoed in his graying gray matter, Are you? Too old?

His legs ached. His back was tired.

Pitchers are only as good as their legs, Early Wynn used to say. And their back, Chucker thought. Oh, his arm ached too, tendons sore from stretching, muscles tender from pushing the small white globe of his world against the inevitability of gravity. But between innings, seated here on the bench, it was his arm that recovered, as elastic as ever, and his right hand that itched for the ball once more. Put me in, Coach, I got another inning in me.

But not the legs. Too tired to stand. His back a dull throbbing mass of muscle gasping for the blood's oxygen. His lungs couldn't pump fast enough. So Chucker panted and panted, head down, back curved, a humble supplicant before the Lord of the Game.

Will the day come, he wondered, when the languorous game of golf will tire me like this? When a tee shot will leave me gasping, a final

putt drop me to my knees on the green in utter exhaustion? Chucker smiled. He couldn't imagine it. Golf was a snap compared to this, a walk in the park, a swing and a stroll and another swing, with time to chat, to sip a soda, and breathe.

Golf, he thought, is baseball's antithesis. The ball waits patiently, expectantly, for the golfer's swing. The smack of the club liberates the small white bird, and it flies exuberantly into the sky, beyond the horizon, somewhere over Dorothy's rainbow, to land and roll along the fair green way until, finally, coming to rest in some secure nest.

So unlike the violent jostling of the game with the bases, where the ball is the battleground, hammered by hickory in one direction, hurled by fielders in another, the only brief respite for the much battered ball being in the sweating palm of the principal participant—the pitcher, hurler, tosser, thrower, hardballer. The chucker.

Resting while his teammates batted, he smiled at the ball in his hand. Old friend, pal, buddy, chum. Not the game ball, obviously, still out there on the field of play, but a graying, streaked and scratched old orb that Chucker had been squeezing and tossing between innings since before time, or so it seemed. He tossed it in the air, caught it between finger and thumb, bounced it off the dugout cement and let it fall—Plop!—into his glove. Too old? he asked the ball. Or shall we show them one more time?

Let the gentler pleasures of golf wait for winter and inevitable retirement. Climb the hill once more, look down the lane toward plate and mitt, toward signal and sign, toward catcher and batter and ump, then wind up the torque of legs and shoulders, belly and breast, hands and ball, to unwind in a whirl of elbows and feet and the little white pellet plummeting once more over the precipice of possibility, streaking, one last time, toward ... home.

Well, folks, it may only be a spring training game, but still ... you don't usually see relief pitchers taking a turn at the plate, nossir, and yet here he comes, No. 63, Chucker Pote, batting for himself. I wonder how many times he's done that—first time this spring, that's for sure. He's the oldest player trying to make the squad and he's standing in there with one out in the eighth. Right hander Doc Mabey looks in for the signal—he nods—he winds ...

Chucker never believed the hitters who claimed they could see the red stitching as the ball left the pitcher's hand, or could read the rotation before the ball was released, but for a moment he thought he saw something red. Was it ...?

Humph!

The ball whizzed by him and smacked into the catcher's mitt before Chucker had blinked.

"Steeerike," the ump bawled.

What am I doing up here? Chucker asked himself. He'd never been much of a hitter, not even in Little League when he was the biggest kid on the team, never seemed comfortable swinging a wooden bat. Now a golf club, that was something else.

Chucker noticed the third base coach yelling at him, "Step out, Pote! Step out!" and he remembered he was supposed to step out of the box before each pitch to check the signals from the coach. Nobody on, one out, what sort of signal could he get? Hand to chest, hand to hat brim, fingers across lips, back to hat brim: bunt.

Chucker shook his head, asking the coach to go through it again, he couldn't believe it, but there it was again: chest, hat, lips, hat: bunt. Like this was batting practice — 10 swings: 2 bunts for the hitters, 8 swings; 5 and 5 for the pitchers—but this was a game, goddamnit! Yeah, just spring training, but a game nonetheless, and if Chucker didn't make the squad he'd be back out on the fairways in a month, no paycheck, no cheering crowds, just him and that smaller, livelier, dimpled ball. God, how he loved to smack that thing! The way it flew, bird-like, toward the horizon—

Humph!

"Steeerike two!"

Chucker stepped out to get his head back in the game, in the right game, this game. The third base coach was yelling and signaling. Pissed I missed his first sign, Chucker thought, but I didn't miss it, I just ignored it. Ignored the pitch too. And there was the sign again—hand to hat brim, twice. If you're not going to bunt, boy-o, you damn well better do something else and not just stand here. Hit the thing, pommel the pill, whack the white, drive the orb into a new orbit. Yeah ... as if he could.

Chucker stepped back into the batter's box, lifted the bat off his shoulders, squinted out at the opposing pitcher, Doc Mabey. No Chucker he, a mere ambiguity — Mabey yes, Mabey no— who turned and tossed. There it was again! The flash of red seams! Chucker could see them, could read the pitch, and with all the might he could muster in his aging torso he turned and twisted and yanked the wooden bat in a swift arc toward the tumbling ball, sending it like a bird shot into the blue high over the heads of all, gracefully arcing across the sky and falling, falling, forever falling ...

Chucker fell. The crowd gasped.

A rainbow, Chucker thought, the party-colored promise of God.

The catcher let the ball fall out of his mitt as he looked down at the earth, not believing what he saw: the batter on the ground. Turning to the man in blue, he said, "But ... it didn't hit him." The arbiter removed his mask and stared down where Chucker lay, smiling, muttering to himself.

"I've hit a rainbow!"

The catcher looked to the ump for an explanation, but the man in blue could only shake his head. The trainer rushed from the dugout wondering what had happened and the manager screamed, "What the hell?" But no one answered. The opposing pitcher tried to understand, as he stood looking at where the batter had fallen. "Maybe ..." Doc said to himself, "maybe," he repeated, but he couldn't fathom it. The great crowd stood, mouths agape, uncomprehending.

*Oh, somewhere in this favored land, the sun is shining bright
Somewhere a band is playing, somewhere hearts are light*

But not here, no. No light hearts beneath the blinding sun in this creaking wooden stadium with a pentagon called "home," where the favored crowds hear an echo of music playing—where's it coming from? No, not here, where the players have dropped their gloves in the outfield grass and the red-ribbed orb, the ball that bound them all, has finally and forever dropped out of its orbit. The sphere of the eternal return unreturned—a globe binding heaven and earth in its leather cover, miles of tightly wound twine that can't unwind, and a resilient cork center that will never bounce back again—has come to rest at last on the dirt of an ancient ball field, where the game has been suspended, eternally, for the failing heart of a fallen pitcher whose final vision and final thoughts are his gift to the game: his swing, golf-like in its perfection, inscribing a parabolic rainbow home run that he alone imagines hanging like a promise over this field of fellows, this diamond of hope, this park of paradox—Chucker's very own field of dreams.

Chucker's heart has struck out.

Only the ball, at rest in the dust beneath the umpire's feet, understands.

This issue of Spitball is dedicated to:

ROBERT R. WALSH,
baseball fan & artist.
5/9/36 - 1/18/14

Joseph Stanton

Still Life with Baseball Cards

(after a painting by Kyle Polzin)

Lives stilled by Harnett and Peto
sport an abundance of antiques
newspapers and music sheets,
Meerschäum pipes and violins,
blunderbusses and dead rabbits,
business cards and candles.

Polzin emulates nature morte
for another time:
a baseball nested in an ancient glove,
a bat reclining behind,
an Odalisque of sorts
on a blanket of worn woolen jersey.
all overseen by a catcher's mask
and a shin guard.

But stealing the show
are three cards,
emblems of both
baseball and tobacco.
Though the artist's a Texan,
his three stars of 1909
all ended up in Pittsburgh.

Baseball as lithographic design
could be a kind of Steel City fate
for Howie Camnitz and Rebel Oakes,
ending, as they did,
with the Federals, in cahoots
it seems
with a losing League,

but the third card is the great Honus,
a Dutchman flying in place,
demure against a gold background,
his card worth now three million,
a tad more, one supposes,
than Polzin got
for his painting.

Foul Ball

In a little more than a month I would reach my twenty-sixth birthday, but on this foggy, damp, and predictably cold Friday night that Candlestick was famous for, I would experience something that every baseball fan dreams of, an experience that some might even consider a life-changing event; and one that is certainly near the top of most people's bucket list. At least it was for me.

I was sitting next to the most beautiful girl I had ever had the good fortune of dating. We were in the lower box seats of Candlestick Park, section 12, row 16, seats 4 and 5 to be exact. It was our first date. I had chosen a Friday night game, knowing that night games at The Stick were always cold and would require a blanket and hopefully some innocent snuggling for warmth.

It was a typical Friday night game for the Giants; unless the Dodgers were in town there were sure to be empty seats around us, and there were. The seats in front of us were vacant, as was the entire row behind. Sitting two rows in front and to our right was a couple I placed to be in their mid-forties. They had a younger boy, maybe ten years old, who had an apparent disability, though of what kind I could not be sure.

In the fourth inning one of my longest, unfulfilled dreams occurred; a right of passage dream. The Giants' Chili Davis was hitting from the left side of the plate against the visiting Pirates' righthander Brian Fisher. A foul ball left his bat, a screaming low line drive, heading my way. I thought I would have to jump to grab it, but the ball had top spin and began to sink quickly. I was standing, but the ball was diving short of my position. The father of the disabled boy in the row in front of us put his hands in front of his son to protect him from getting hit by the ball. The ball ricocheted off of the man's hands and caromed over my head. Even with a late jump, I was unable to prevent the ball from going past me. I turned and saw it bounce off a group of three men, none of whom seemed to know each other, but who had pounced from their seats to retrieve their trophy. The collision that their bodies created allowed the ball to float gently back towards me. It fell softly into my hands. The Golden Sphere. After attending hundreds of ballgames in my lifetime, I had my first foul ball. All of a sudden I was not 25 years old but the eight-year-old boy attending his first major league baseball game. I was giddy. Not necessarily the cool persona I strived to display on a date, much less the date of the century.

A fellow across the aisle from me had the ballgame on his hand-held radio. He turned up the volume and shoved the radio in my direction, holding it with a straight arm with the speakers facing me. It took me a few seconds to realize what he was doing and another moment to



realize what I was hearing.

"It's a real shame that young boy didn't end up with that ball," the radio announcer commented. "Don't you think that man should give it to the young fella?" he asked his partner in the booth.

The man with the radio kept it pointed in my direction. He wore a scowl on his face, the scowl of a man who himself had never retrieved a foul ball in his life and was going to do whatever he could to make sure I, too, didn't experience the gaiety derived by so few baseball fans in the grand scheme of fandom; being the owner of an official major league baseball, struck from the bat of a major league player during the course of an official major league baseball game.

"So whatcha goin' do?" asked the man with the radio. "Come on ... give the kid the ball."

I returned his scowl with my own equally distasteful look, the one I had mastered in high school as a result of being deathly afraid of girls. It kept them all away. Well, that and acne.

From a couple of rows behind me came another voice.

"I betcha he gives the ball to his girlfriend," said a middle aged woman. One whom I wished had minded her own business. "Don't they make a cute couple?" she asked her husband, who had no interest in who got the ball and waved off his wife with his own distasteful wave of his hand as his eyes never left the field.

I tried to ignore the lady behind me, pretending I hadn't heard her. I sat in my seat, both hands wrapped around the orb with the facsimile Chub Feeney signature on it. The half inning ended a few pitches later. I did my best to casually glance at my date, wondering if she had heard the lady behind us.

The blonde beauty was turned, looking at me with a flirty but determined expression.

"Well?" she said smiling and, believe it or not, batting her long mascara darkened eyelashes.

"Well what?" I said, pretending not to know what she was talking about.

Without saying a word she made a deliberate yet subtle stare at the baseball, lowering her entire head, not just her baby-blue eyes, and then raising back up to look at me. She smiled again.

Would it be considered chivalrous to present my first and only foul ball to this gorgeous woman to my left? Though I already felt pretty confident there would be a second date, the act of giving her the baseball would solidify it.

But what of the disabled young boy in the row in front of me? It would be quite a demonstration of strong character, compassion, and selflessness to pass the ball on to him.

My date or the disabled boy? I felt as if every pair of eyes in the park were burning holes in my person, but a quick scan around the im-

mediate area proved that no one cared about the destination of the ball. Almost no one. My date suddenly seemed to be going downhill, and I noticed how she had shifted her weight to the side of her seat opposite me, pulling the blanket along with her.

Exasperated, I turned to see the radio man still giving me his scowl.

"Ball game is going on over there," I said to him, pointing to the field.

Sensing my displeasure with his interference, he gave me one last squint of his eyes before re-directing his attention towards the game. As if things couldn't get any worse, the disabled boy turned over his left shoulder and gave me the sorriest look he could muster on his angelic face. I pretended that I didn't see him look, but he knew I'd seen him. Damn.

"Want something to eat or drink?" I asked my date.

She shrugged her shoulders but was otherwise non-responsive.

"I'm going to get a beer," I said. "Last chance."

Nothing.

I got up from my seat, taking my foul ball with me, and made my way up the stairs to the concession stand. Waiting in line I began to roll the ball around in my right hand. In the line next to me I heard the voice of the old lady sitting a couple of rows behind me.

"Aren't you that nice young man who got the foul ball?" she asked me. "Your young lady friend sure is striking," the matchmaker continued. "I bet she'll really like having a real baseball from the game. You know I've never caught a foul ball myself, but my husband almost caught one. It made him spill his beer which he wasn't happy about ..."

"Look, lady," I interrupted, "what I do with the ball is up to me, and I'd appreciate it if you'd mind your own business." Wow, I couldn't believe I'd said that. Rude on my part? Possibly. Effective in achieving my goal? Yes.

I bought the maximum two beers when I got to the front of the line. If my date wasn't going to drink one, I would welcome the second one myself. I also purchased a couple of pretzels to help soak up the suds. "Throw in a bag of peanuts, too," I added to my order.

As I descended the aisle, I walked past the row where my date was still sitting coldly, and it had nothing to do with the temperature.

I stopped two rows in front of my seat. "Hey, kid, here's a bag of peanuts for you," I said as I tossed the bag like a rookie vendor to the youngster who had missed out on the foul ball.

His father intercepted the bag and gave me a disgusted look. "He has peanut allergies," he said, tossing the bag back to me with more expertise than I had shown with my toss. I smiled, though I wasn't sure if it was a smile of embarrassment or shamefulness.

As I trudged the two rows back toward my seat, a voice from my

left said, "I'll take the peanuts if you don't want 'em." I looked over and saw it was the man with the transistor radio. Now tired of trying to be the nice guy and having no success at it, I gave him a muttered "Fat chance."

"Here you go," I said, making a peace offering of a beer and a pretzel when I reached my seat.

"No thanks," she said.

"Suit yourself," I said after biting off a chunk of pretzel just prior to my first gulp of beer.

Top of the sixth. I looked upward, wishing somehow for a rainout so I could get away from the ballpark. But no clouds were in sight, just fog, and I was not going to hold my breath for any divine intervention. Getting the foul ball had surely sufficed in that department.

Sitting in silence next to my once promising date, I asked myself what was the right thing to do in the circumstances. If I gave the ball to the disabled boy, I could really make his night, and I would certainly feel good about that. That would be the compassionate thing to do, but after his dad had turned down the peanuts I doubted he would accept anything from me at that point. I could have given the ball to my date, but at that point the gift might not have been enough to result in a second date. Boy, she looked pissed.

If only I had previously caught a foul ball in my baseball-game-attending past ... I would have had that first ball and might not have found it so difficult to part with that night's prize.

Weighing my options carefully, prioritizing my values, and being sure I understood what was really important to me helped me to reach a decision I have lived with peacefully in my succeeding years.

"Here," I said to my date, "this ought to be enough cab fare to get you home. It's been fun."

She could have fit the baseball itself into the big whole in the middle of her face when her jaw dropped.

That baseball has sure looked good sitting on my mantle ever since.

Rob Jacques

That Old Ball Game

Well, it's strike three. Go sit down.
The inning isn't over, but you are.
And it's the ninth, and at least
this time you went down swinging,
unlike the sixth with so much game to go
when you stood gawking, took that curve,
a called third, every batter's woe.

You never liked the pitcher,
a pimply kid with a rifle arm,
and given his high-inside fast ball,
he didn't like you, either.
The catcher, with the face like a Rottweiler
and the attitude of a wet cat,
thought you crowded the plate
and had the pitcher dust you back.

No matter. You walk to the bench,
the boys silent, looking away,
the crowd noisy, staring its disappointment
into your skull, all the while the manager,
frumpy in his loose-fitting jacket,
grimly smiling his "Yikes! You swung
at that last pitch? You nuts?" smile.

And the next batter homers. What's-his-name,
and you are blessedly forgotten now
in a sea of roar, a loud land of hope,
back-slapping happy, that crowd,
extra-innings coming, you can smell them
and fame for the fortunate few
in a game where everyone shares, humbled,
bowed, only fifteen minutes of blame.

Demons at the Gate

My name is Max Plunkett. As I relate this story, I'm eighty-two and the year is 1950. I wish I could say I am in good health, but that's far from being the case. In 1947 I was struck, suddenly and quite unexpectedly, with a late-in-age case of polio. Throughout history the world has experienced many insidious diseases, and in the twentieth century it's polio that's decided to rear its ugly head. So here I am; wheelchair bound, an embittered widower and living with my youngest daughter. Needless to say, I have plenty of time to think; to relive, over and over again, my long and illustrious career, which dates back as far as 1891. Why do I keep torturing myself, knowing I'm only a shell of my former self? Perhaps I think daydreaming is a good therapy.

As a sportswriter, I'd worked for a good number of newspapers, mostly throughout New England. But the one that stands out the most is the *Boston Globe*, where I typed out my column -1896 through 1901- on an old Remington Standard 2 which had a keyboard with a deformed b, f, and p.

I covered most every sport, mostly local, from Harvard Crimson football to the first five Boston Marathons to the retirement years of the "Boston Strong Boy," John L. Sullivan. Even ... yuck ... tennis and golf. But my absolute favorite was writing about baseball, especially the good old Boston Beaneaters.

The first person who comes to mind this morning, while my wheelchair is parked on the back porch of my daughter's house, is the noteworthy yet tragic Martin "Marty" Bergen. Marty played in something like 350 games during his four-year career with the Beaneaters; often distinguishing himself, many times not. His dark moods and sudden funks were hardly fun to witness, but I'll get to that later.

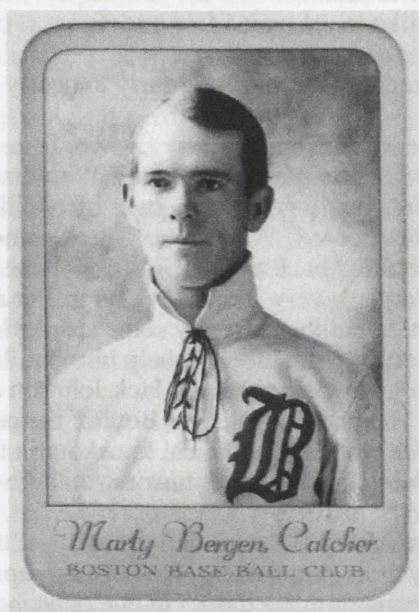
Batting a stalwart .372, Marty suddenly upped and left the Kansas City Blues in 1895, following what he perceived to be a slight. Boston having scouted him, the team's decision-makers were quick to snap up his contract for \$1,000. At first, it was a deal made in heaven, paying off in spades. Marty served a big role in helping the Beaneaters win two straight National League pennants in 1897 and 1898, as well as finish second in '99.

As a catcher, Marty was unsurpassed; over and over again throwing out baserunners with his quick eye and whip-like throws. I once interviewed Jesse Burkett, somewhere around 1921, and the future Hall of Famer told me in no uncertain terms that Marty Bergen was the best the world had ever produced. Burkett, by the way, holds the record for the most inside-the-park home runs, which stands at 55. If anyone knew baseball skills, it was Jesse. Even players who didn't like Marty couldn't

argue the fact that he was one hell of a good catcher, possessing a natural ability that often times seemed uncanny. Bergen certainly made his mark on baseball. Unfortunately, in as many bad ways as good.

I guess we all have our demons; some of us far more than others. In some cases it's a glitch in the brain or a family trait; in other cases it's more self-imposed. I'm not sure how Marty's would be classified. But, I swear, there were other times when the Devil himself was right there, whispering trash in his ear.

The good relations between Bergen and his fellow Beaneaters took a sudden nosedive after Marty had an altercation with pitcher Vic Willis and subsequently slapped him in the face during a team breakfast in Saint Louis. And from there Marty began to go straight down hill, becoming even more erratic and unpredictable. His five-year-old son Martin had passed away from diphtheria in April of 1899, and he started to imagine that his teammates were making jokes behind his back about the boy's death. During this same period, he began to sit in defensive positions, as well as walking sideways, claiming he wanted to be able to see armed assassins coming from either direction.



Compliments of Ars Longa Art Studio

Happening upon the catcher one day on a street corner, I approached him in the hopes of a quick and spontaneous interview. If possible, I wanted to find out what was eating at him, why he'd so suddenly gone off his rocker. I was that kind of a sportswriter: frank, to the point, not mincing my words or beating around the bush. Just kick Pandora's Box to see what pops out.

"Hello, Marty," I said, grabbing hold of his arm. "I want to ask you some questions." He whirled, eyes wide with fright, fists clenching. It looked as though he didn't recognize me. "Get out of here! Leave me alone!"

"It's me, for chrissake. Max Plunkett."

"Max Plunkett?" His eyes darted around like he was looking for a quick avenue of escape. "Are ... are you here to kill me?"

"What in the blue blazes are you talking about?"

After a few blinks, he returned to reality in a heartbeat. "Oh, yeah, Max. Hey, how's it going?"

"I'm fine. But you seem to be a bit out of it."

"No, I'm okay." He righted his derby. In his panic it had nearly fallen off his head. "I was lost in a daydream, I guess."

"More like a nightmare."

"Hey, you be good, Max. I have to get a move on. You know ... places to go, people to see."

"C'mon. I'd like to ask you a few questions ... concerning your recent behavior."

A horse snorted nearby, causing Marty to nearly jump out of his shoes.

"It won't take long, I promise."

"Not today, Max. It's not a good time." With that, he made a wild dash across the street, nearly getting run over by a milk wagon. From the opposite sidewalk he shouted, "Maybe next week sometime!"

Perplexed, I headed back to *The Globe*, with the intention of writing a piece about Bergen's very strange behavior. But after some consideration, I decided to cut the poor guy some slack. He was digging his own grave, and I wasn't in the mood to help him out. Instead, I wrote an article about a boxing newcomer named Jack Johnson and his match with John W. "Klondike" Haynes in Chicago. Both of the pugilists happened to be black. Klondike won on a technical knockout in the fifth round. Of course, as you probably know, Jack Johnson would go on to far greater things.

If I considered Marty Bergen's actions strange, they were merely the tip of the slowly emerging iceberg. He began to up and mysteriously disappear, no one seeing him for days. On one outstanding occurrence he walked off the team's train while on a road trip, leaving the Beaneaters with only a backup catcher during a heavily-contested pennant race. On yet another occasion Marty vanished and showed up unannounced only

minutes before a game, slipping into his catching gear without exchanging a single word with anyone. Having finally had enough, manager Frank Selee imposed a \$300 fine on him for being absent without leave.

There was a rumor, and I repeat "rumor," that Marty had broken his hip during a game. The facts in this case are rather sketchy. If he did suffer the injury, he wasn't gone for very long, and it didn't appear to affect his performance. However, he did undergo some surgery in January of 1899, and it was said that the anesthesia only worsened his state of mind.

Unlike others who suffer mental woes, Marty was privy to his problem and often sought the help of doctors and the clergy in an effort to control his demons. A Dr. Dionne prescribed him a bromide to stem the tide, but Bergen refused to take it, saying that an unknown party in the National League was conspiring with his doctor and his wife, Hattie, in an attempt to poison him.

The kicker came on October 9, 1899, when Marty had to be forcibly removed from a game after avoiding pitches rather than catching them. His ridiculous excuse: he was preoccupied dodging the knife thrusts of an invisible assailant. The loony bin appeared to be getting closer and closer.

A week following that incident, I happened to come across Bergen in an eatery we both frequented. He was seated at a table, staring vacantly into his coffee. He was a good-looking guy, usually neatly dressed, but on this occasion his face looked pale and haggard and his clothes terribly rumpled.

"Hey, Marty, how's it going?" I chirped, trying to put a happy spin on things, as I eased, uninvited, into the chair opposite him.

He kept his eyes on his coffee, not responding.

"Marty. Hey, Marty. Are you okay?" It was one of those dumb questions. I knew damn well he was far from "okay."

He snapped his head up, rapidly blinking. There were purplish pouches under his eyes. "What? Oh, hello, Max. Did ... did you say something?"

"We just had a devastating earthquake. Didn't you feel it?"

"Huh?"

"Oh, never mind. Like I asked: are you okay?"

A shrug. "I've had better days. I've had worse."

I looked warily around, feigning nervousness. "It looks clear. I don't see any assassins." Then I gave a chuckle. "But of course I wouldn't. They're invisible, right?" As soon as I uttered the comment I regretted it. Unfortunately, my sarcasm often got the best of me. "Hey, disregard that, okay. Sometimes I don't think before I speak."

If my foolish quip angered Marty, it didn't show. He sat there, looking sad, fiddling with his coffee cup. "Earlier this morning I went to see a priest to ask for his help."

"What did he say?"

"He ... he said that God loves me and He's watching over me." Suddenly, Marty's eyes glistened with tears and his lips began to tremble. "I can only hope He is. What do you think, Max? Is He really watching over me?"

In that instant, I don't think I've ever felt more compassion for anyone in my life. I hesitated for a moment, wrestling with my emotions.

"Max?" Marty reached out and placed his hand atop mine. "What do you think?"

"Sure ... sure He's watching over you. God will get you past all of this, Marty. All it takes is faith. You do have faith, don't you?"

A hard swallow. "I'm trying. I'm really trying." With a tear trickling down his cheek, Marty suddenly leapt to his feet and hurried out the door. Just like that, as though his pants were on fire.

Moments later, as I sat there, wondering, a waitress rushed over to the table. "Hey! Mister Bergen forgot to pay for his coffee and apple pie."

"How much is it?"

She snatched the bill from the pocket of her apron and held it under my nose. Sighing, I fished into my pocket for a few coins and held them out in the palm of my hand. She picked up the proper amount, then gave me a questioning look.

"Are you in the mood for a two cent tip?"

"Be my guest."

"Thanks." She chose two Indian Head pennies and dropped them into the apron pocket. "You know, it's too bad about Marty. He treats me well enough, but he seems like a real nutcase. A lot of times he just sits at this same table, mumbling to himself and waving his hands." She snorted a quick laugh. "One time he jumped to his feet and started shouting at who knows who. There was no one there."

Without responding, I headed out the door. Bergen was standing in the middle of the street a ways up, with his head bowed, wagons and buggies cutting a path around him.

If God were indeed watching over Marty, he wasn't doing a very good job because the troubled catcher kept right up with his crazy antics. Then on January 19 of 1900, I received news that something bad, really bad, had happened at Marty's farmhouse in North Brookfield, Massachusetts. Obviously, his demons had launched an all-out attack. Desperate for transportation, I got ahold of my friend, Larry Cox, who'd just bought a new Locomobile steam carriage. He agreed to drive me to Brookfield, and off we went, with Larry wearing a white linen duster and goggles, the finicky vehicle trembling, its motor stuttering and puttering and threatening to die. Every twenty miles or so, we had to stop so Larry could refill the tank. He must have had a half dozen jugs of water crammed into the carriage's storage space.

When we mercifully reached our destination, there were a good number of people lingering about in ghoulish fascination; talking excitedly and staring at the little farmhouse, a few of the more curious peering into the windows. I couldn't help thinking about the similarity to Lizzie Borden, who'd killed her father and stepmother with an axe nearly eight years previously in Fall River, Massachusetts. Were her demons the same as Marty's? Noticing an old man in farmer clothes standing off at a distance, I headed over. He was so lost in thought it didn't appear he was aware of my presence.

"Excuse me, sir. May I ask who you are?"

Silence.

"Hello. Excuse me, sir."

He kept staring. Finally, he released a long sigh. "Poor Hattie. Poor little Florence and Joseph."

"Are you a neighbor?"

"Yup. I've been here for a long time. I ... I just can't seem to get my feet moving." Another sigh. "I guess it's the shock of the whole thing."

"Can you explain what happened?"

"I can explain what happened, but I can't explain why it happened."

Impatient, I waited a few moments longer, not willing to push him.

The man looked at me with the mournful expression of an old hound dog. "Marty must have gone insane. He ... he killed his poor wife, along with his three-year-old son and six-year-old daughter. He used an axe. The police told me there was blood everywhere." The man stopped to take a long calming breath. "And ... and you're not going to believe this next part."

Although shocked and sickened, I motioned for him to continue.

"Then the damn fool took a straight razor to his own throat, cutting so deeply that he nearly severed his head. My god, how can anyone manage something like that?"

A gorge rose to my throat, and I hurried off a distance, struggling to keep it at bay. Larry started over but I waved him away, wanting to be alone. I felt the sting of tears as I thought about the last time I saw Marty and the solace he was struggling for, wondering whether God was watching over him. The Big Man probably was. But in the end I guess even the Almighty has His limitations.

We headed back to Boston in the infernal Locomobile, stopping at a farm so Larry could refill his jugs with water. The tortuous ride was unnerving, especially in the growing dark. I decided there'd be no new-fangled motoring contraptions for me. I'd stick with my bicycle. And it did serve me well whenever I had to navigate Beantown's puzzling maze of streets.

I hardly spoke a word during the entire 70-mile trip, my thoughts

exclusively on Marty and the horrendous deed he'd carried out. What would I say in my column? Should I crucify him, or be more compassionate, explaining the insidious effects of mental illness? I certainly didn't want to be hard on the man, since he'd probably had very little control over his actions. I figured that Marty and his family were victims, and so was baseball, I realized, for losing a man with so much potential. Would the game ever experience another player with such lightening instincts and so accurate a throwing arm? Maybe, but I sort of doubted it.

In the end I wrote only an obituary, highlighting Bergen's baseball career and giving a brief summary of his funeral. No mention of Marty's mental illness, his crazy erratic behavior, or how he'd turned into an axe-wielding psychopath. Thankfully, my fellow sportswriter, Tim Murnane, was equally as gentle, writing that Marty was "entitled to the undivided sympathy of the baseball public, as well as players and directors."

I skipped the church service but did attend the burial, standing off at a distance, hat in hand, trying to remain inconspicuous. There were a good number of mourners present; some emotionally upset, others bearing the wide-eyed expression of the curiosity seeker. From major league baseball only Connie Mack and Billy Hamilton were present. Frank Selee, team captain Hugh Duffy, and the rest of the Beaneaters were absent, having thought that the funeral was being held the following day, January 21. Yeah, sure. What a lot of hooey that was. To put it simply, they were embarrassed and ashamed of Marty, offering no sympathies toward his mental condition.

In December of 1901, I left *The Globe* after a dispute with my editor and obtained a sportswriting job not far away in Worcester, on the *Evening Gazette*. My very first piece covered the inaugural Rose Bowl game played in Pasadena, California.

By that time I was having serious doubts about Marty having slaughtered his family and killing himself. He'd loved his kids, and insanity or not I just couldn't see him ending their lives in such a horrible manner. The big question for me was: how could anyone slice his own throat with a straight razor, so forcibly, to the very point of decapitation? It just didn't seem possible. Perhaps an intruder had slain the family. Had the police investigated such a possibility, or did they decide to wrap the case up quickly and easily without making much of an effort?

I approached my editor with the idea of writing an article, exploring my thoughts and reservations, but he said no, explaining that it would cause too great a stir. I tried a second time in 1921 while working for the *Hartford Courant*, billed as the country's oldest newspaper. But once again my editor put the kibosh on it, telling me that I was a sportswriter, not a crime writer. At that point I totally dropped my whole theory, trying to wipe it from my thoughts. Marty Bergen would go down in history remembered more for his heinous deed than he would for his baseball prowess.

Finally, in 1934, Bergen's memory received a much-deserved boost. Connie Mack and the multi-talented George M. Cohan, both with ties to North Brookfield, started a drive to help raise funds for a granite memorial to Marty. It was placed at the catcher's gravesite in St. Joseph's Cemetery. The inscription read: "In memory of Martin Bergen, 1871-1900. Member of the Boston National League Club. Erected in appreciation of his contribution to America's national game." I could only hope that no one would ever have it removed or replaced.

As expected, Marty was never inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

I feel a hand on my shoulder, startling me out of my reverie. It's my daughter, Eunice, and she looks concerned. "Are you okay, Dad? You look lost to the world."

"You should know me by now. Living in the past is better than living in the present; especially in this dang-blamed wheelchair." I offer a wry chuckle. "My body has failed me, but my memory remains sharp as a tack."

"It looks like you have been crying."

"Me cry? Naw. It's my allergies acting up."

"In October?"

"Yeah, in October."

"Of course, you're planning to listen to the World Series."

"Wouldn't miss it. Good old Mel Allen."

"Will the Yankees win today, taking the Series in just four games?"

"Yup. It's going to be a sweep. Do you think you can make me up a couple of hot dogs, with relish and mustard? I want to listen to the game in true baseball fashion."

My daughter laughs, maneuvering my wheelchair to push it into the house. "Sure I will, Dad. And my husband will probably want the same."

Raising my often-flagging spirits, I begin to sing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." It's been my favorite song since it first came out in 1908, although I prefer the 1927 version. As we enter the kitchen, I hear my son-in-law, Fred, joining in from the living room.

Bob Mayberry

Foul!

(with a tip of the cap to Allen Ginsberg, who threw out the first ball)

I saw the best players of my generation snubbed
by baseball denied invisible ignored
dragging themselves from sandlot to sandlot
looking for a game any game five-tool players
burning for some kind of connection
to the national media machinery of sports
gifted players who drinking and womanizing
and playing high still smoked the ball
over dirt fields beneath darkening skies
and ran like Olympians round white bases
who hurled fastballs slowballs knucklers and curves
palmballs changeups screwballs and slurves
spitters and gyros and—wait for it!—the Eephus too
swinging Black Betsys and playing blackball
until the sun set behind bleachers of frenzied folks
cheering their heroes to second and third but
never home

who passed through the same fabled halls
and played on the same hallowed fields
as the namesakes the heroes the glory-strewn
and beloved boys of summers gone by
who stood naked in their darkness beneath
the racial slurs and silent before the spitting hatred
of the fair skinned and well dressed
who were expelled from the game for lying
about their color their name their country
of origin pretending to be Cuban or Latin
Indian or Mexican just to play—to play!—
without cowering in the shower room
or shuffling among lockers head down
mumbling apologies for being so good

who played the national game with verve
with zing with spirit and flair
jazzing it up or cooling it down
playing for pennies on the poor side of town
with Cool Papa Bell taunting on first
and Big Train Parker staring him down
Carlos Moran with his magnetic glove

and Fleet Walker dancing the basepaths
a black blur 60 years before Jackie

who broke the bank and shattered the mold
and opened the floodgates for all the Curts
and Willies and Henrys that followed
and lonely Larry Doby first in the American League
but last in American memories like so many
forgotten if ever known for who among us remembers
the chocolate sweet swing of Walter Buck Leonard
the sudden swift strikes of Bullet Joe Rogan
or hide-thumping thwap of Mister Joshua Gibson
smashing the ball to the walls of his own Jericho
Oh my! Oh boy! Oh shit! Long gone

who barnstormed across the Depression Midwest
with Feller and Dizzy with the Clipper and Ruth
and won more often than they lost when
Satch was on the patch when the Bee ball
was abuzzin' and his Long Tom ahummin'
when the Four Day Creeper mixed with his Hurry Up
rendering bats useless and lumber unswung
his outfielders and infielders invited to picnic
on the grass while the great Satchel Paige dispatched

O! those night-colored players dazzling sunlit crowds
who slept four to the floor in flea-bit backrooms
and took their dinner from alley ashcans
who bummed rides from town to town
enduring insults and threats before every match
who dared not sip from the white boys' fountain
though they shared a field a ball a score and a game

who drank and swore and spat and pissed
like any other ballplaying kid
who got angry and drunk when basehits wouldn't fall
busted water coolers and drove too fast
who purgatoried their nights with dreams
of homers in the gloaming and shutouts in the 9th
who tortured their bodies with booze and
with uppers and got themselves busted
just like the Babe and so many others
who solaced themselves with more booze
and an endless string of Baseball Sadies

who ranted in the back alleys of Pittsburgh
and roared in the summer dusk of Brooklyn
whose uniforms proudly proclaimed the Grays
the Homesteaders the Monarchs and Daisies
Black Barons and Buckeyes the Eagles and Crawfords
while in New York and Chicago and Newark too
they were simply called the Giants
and giants were they all

recreating the syntax of good ol' American ball
standing before us day after day night after night
with nothing more than a stick of wood
and a sphere of horsehide naked in their fear
resplendent in their talents they play and they play and
they play as if there were no tomorrow
no yesterday no growing up no growing old
no greener pastures to be let out into
no world but this world this sandlot this field

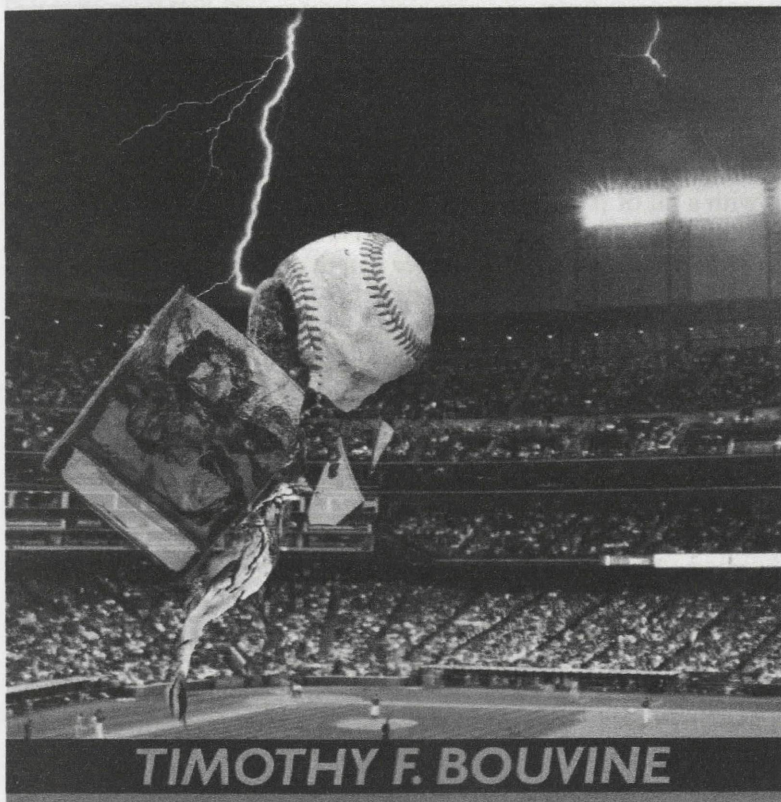
be it the wooden horseshoe of some minor league
or the cement O of the majors
in all its electrical/electronic glory
illuminating and magnificating for all to see—

a tiny patch of green grass in the heart of
the stone city and dirt baselines demarking
fair from foul safe from out where the dark boys of summer
stand waiting hoping dreaming and knowing
that out of their bodies comes the sport of millions
out of their bodies the runs and outs
ice cream cone catches and beanball bruises
every opening pitch every final out

and underscoring their performance
like some barbaric Ginsbergian yawp
they hear the crowd the fans the bugs the cranks
who lift the long lonely lyric lament of their
Foul!

CATCHING LIGHTNING

WITHOUT THE BOTTLE



An exciting new Chicago Cubs baseball novel about the fight against alcoholism with an original plot twist. Don't miss this home run by author Timothy F. Bouvine and Savage Press

(A Superior Publishing Company)!

M. P. Romary

The Catcher

For Larry M.

Life can hit some so hard and in such measure
that it doesn't begin to look like life but something
more deliberate than the random acts we find
evidence of on the streets of any given day.

In those instances, I ask myself, what must the heart
and head have done, what dreams in the dark were
resurrected, which ones put away for good,
and which ones still struggle in the twilight and dawn
on any given day, which ones were transformed.

Take for instance a friend whose brother Larry was
born with a bit of palsy, not enough to disable him
as some are by lack of speech and uncontrollable limbs.
Then at five, polio by a much longer length disabling
him to leg braces and back brace, crutches and a
walk that was all but not existent, a mere standing.

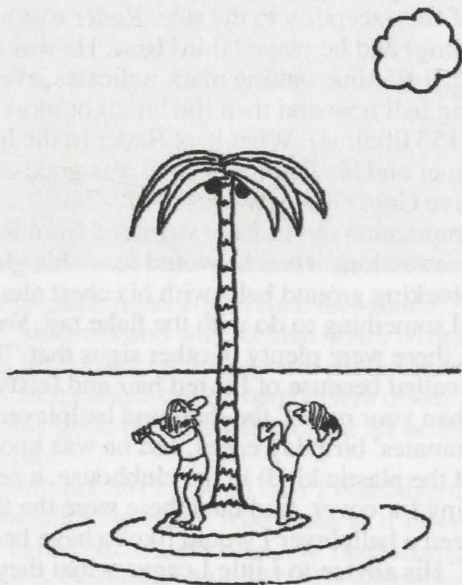
When talking to him he came around to baseball
all the time. Del Crandall and Yogi Berra were
his idols, both catchers. He knew averages
for the younger catchers too and followed them
in the morning paper.

When young he said he wanted to be a catcher
when he grew up. An older brother and a sister
would ask him questions in which they
joined in the image –what team and how he would
handle so and so as a pitcher. He had answers which
his Inquisitors could only nod to: "Might work on him"
was the reply.

They didn't quite get it. For him, he was dressed out
in mask and chest protector, shin guards, trotting out
to the mound, the sole means of catching
on his leathered right hand a blazing fast ball, pop up,
or a hanging curve ball that wasn't hit out of the park.
"Keep it down and inside. You've got seven guys
backin' you up. One pitch at a time."

He'd trot back behind the plate and wait for the pitch which maybe the umpire would call a ball instead of the strike it was. And just like the rest of us, he'd cry foul, ask the umpire if he was blind, whose side was he on.

I think of him now in a nursing home on Medicare,
brother and sister scattered, mother and father deceased.
I wonder if he asks himself if he should have answered
differently when spoken to,
ripped off his mask throwing it to the ground,
getting himself thrown out of the game.
Or maybe just respond just like he did,
stand up throwing the ball back to his pitcher:
"I'm catchin' strikes, ump.
Nothin' but strikes."



"Where did you say 1st base is again?"

TONY
CALVELLO

Card Blanche



In baseball lingo a “flake” is an oddball, a queer duck, a nut case. You get the idea. Many of baseball’s most well-known flakes have been pitchers (perhaps because they have a lot of time on their hands) or left-handers, players who by definition are not normal like the rest of us. Left-handed pitchers are thus automatically suspect, deemed certifiably goofy until they prove themselves otherwise.

Not all flakes fit the profile though, and Doug Rader, who spent most of his 11-year major league career with the Houston Astros is a perfect example of the exception to the rule. Rader was a right-hander (throwing and batting) and he played third base. He was a boringly average hitter, as his .251 lifetime batting mark indicates, even though he could muster a long ball now and then (he hit 20 or more home runs three times and totaled 155 lifetime). What kept Rader in the lineup was his reputation as a gamer and his fielding, which was good enough to earn him five consecutive Gold Glove Awards (1970-74).

The gamer reputation might have stemmed from Rader’s unusual fielding drills, those sessions when he would leave his glove in the dug-out and practice blocking ground balls with his chest alone. This exercise may also have had something to do with the flake tag. You be the judge.

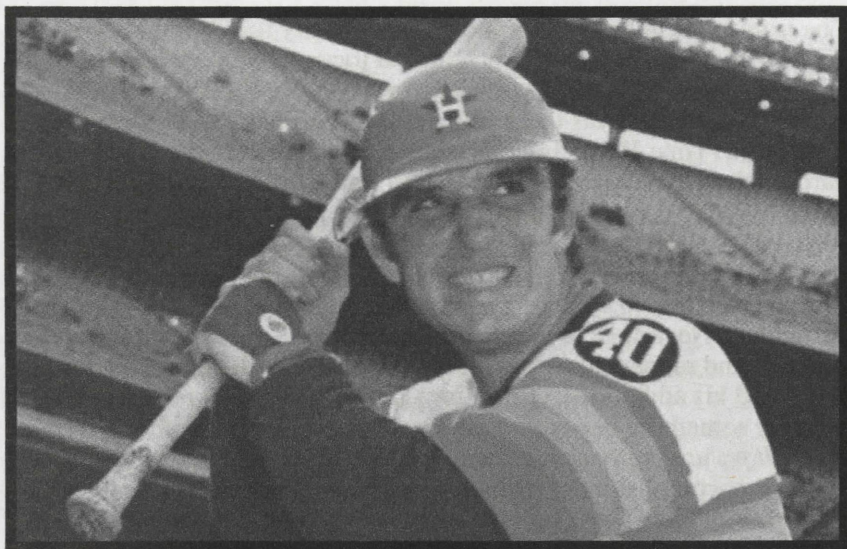
In any case, there were plenty of other signs that “The Red Rooster,” as Rader was called because of his red hair and feisty demeanor, was something other than your run-of-the-diamond ballplayer. He liked to sit, naked, on teammates’ birthday cakes, and he was known to whack real golf balls (not the plastic kind) in the clubhouse, a prank which sent teammates scurrying for cover. And then there were the things he’d say, like “If I hadn’t been a ballplayer I would like to have been a pirate or a Tahitian Warlord.” His advice to Little Leaguers that they should eat their baseball cards because of all the nutritional statistics on the backs of the cards is a classic of flake-ese.

Rader was not somebody to mess with either. While in college he had boxed for spending money in glorified slug fests, and as an Astro he was the most feared double play buster in the National League.

Some staid observers of the national pastime were surprised that a cut-up like Rader was given the chance to manage in the major leagues. His stints with the Rangers (1983-85) and Angels (1989-91) were memo-

able if not particularly successful. In an effort to boost morale he and his coaches once served a picnic —complete with beach blankets and suntan lotion— to his Rangers' players in the outfield.

He was ejected one pitch into the first exhibition game he managed for Texas. After umpire Jerry Neudecker called the pitch a ball, Rader bellowed loudly, "Am I going to have to put up with this s—t all year?" Later after a tough loss he threw his game pants across his office where they landed atop the head of an intimidated reporter who let them stay

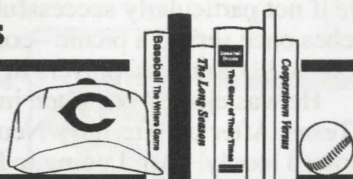


there until the post-game press conference had ended. He tried to put on a calmer self in California and was rankled when writers always wanted him to talk about his former escapades as a player, learning the hard way that a reputation once earned can be hard to live down. On balance, Doug Rader was probably good for baseball because all he ever wanted to do was have a little fun.

Case in point: this SSPC (Sport Star Publishing Company) card of a teeth-gritting bat-choking Rader who looks as if he wants to murder a soft tapper back to the pitcher. It's card #59 from the 630-card set produced in 1975 but not released until 1976, by which time Rader had been traded to San Diego. SSPC ran into licensing problems and produced only this one major set; but its similarity to the 1953 Bowman set, with "pure" cards containing nothing on the fronts but player photos, makes it worth having. Once valued at \$150 the set retails today at more like \$75. Leave it to a flake like Rader to create one of the more shuffle-stopping cards in the set.

(Mike Shannon)

Baseball Book News



The irony of Pete Rose's continuing ineligibility for Cooperstown is that the punishment guarantees renewed focus on him whenever Hall of Fame elections and inductions are in the news. Rose remains "An American Dilemma" as the subtitle of Kostya Kennedy's biography, **Pete Rose** (Time Home Entertainment), indicates. Although Kennedy hardly raises the topic at all, the Hall of Fame question hangs like a cloud over the narrative; in part because the author shows the visiting Rose being himself, doing his thing in Cooperstown in alternating chapters. Judicious yet thorough, the book surprisingly covers new ground, especially in regard to Rose's marriages and his children (son Petey in particular). Nevertheless, in the end, outside of Rose's absolute love of baseball and money, his iron will to win, an ability to shut out all distractions, and his addiction to gambling; Kennedy discovers that his subject remains something of a mystery, even to those closest to him. // Here at *Spitball* we are pretty sick of hearing about PED, which makes James Bailey's accomplishment with his new baseball novel, **Nine Bucks a Pound** (Sun Field Press), all the more amazing. It is the modern story of a deal between the devil and Del Tanner, a first baseman in the Minnesota Twins organization, who injects batting power-increasing illegal drugs long enough to boost him out of the minors. Bailey's goal of presenting a believable character whose motivations are understandable, if not excusable, is realized; even if Tanner's downfall is predictable. Other well-drawn characters, plausible dialogue, and a sure feel for the landscape of professional baseball round out the pleasures to be had in reading the book. // **Jackie & Campy** (University of Nebraska Press) by William C. Kashatus is an account of the "rocky relationship" between the first two black major league stars who were Brooklyn Dodgers teammates, Jackie Robinson and Roy Campanella. A natural rivalry for team leadership developed between the two players, but what drove them apart was their differing approaches to furthering civil rights. The complaisant and patient Campanella believed in being a good role model, while the aggressive and demanding Robinson favored bold activism. Kashatus examines both positions and players fairly and concludes that both men did a great deal for the cause. While much has been published about each player, the team, and the integration of baseball, never until now has this topic received its deserved treatment. This is an original and important

book. // Rob Goldman, the author of **Nolan Ryan: The Making of a Pitcher** (Triumph Books), is a former batboy for the California Angels and a personal friend of the subject of this biography; which is lengthy, sympathetic, highly informative, and breezy yet serious. Chief among the book's many virtues are the accounts of Ryan's ground-breaking training methods (and his relationships with the people behind them); the delineation of his evolution from a power thrower to a power pitcher; the stories behind the forces which led him to change teams three times; and a convincing argument for Ryan's place among the greatest pitchers of all time. Best of all is the emergence of a detailed portrait of Ryan as one of baseball's most gifted and competitive players, as well as one of the game's true gentlemen. // **The Local Boys** (Clerisy Press) by Joe Heffron and Jack Heffron is an entertaining compilation of snapshot biographies of 104 "hometown" ballplayers who have played for the Cincinnati Reds. As such, the book is a continuing demonstration of the importance of baseball to the Queen City. Stars such as Rose, Larkin, and Griffey Jr. are included, but more intriguing are the obscure lesser lights, such as Clarence "Kid" Baldwin, a sawed-off 19th century catcher whose hell-raising life style brought about his premature demise at age 32. // If entire books about a single game are over-kill, what about a book about a single at bat? Not excessive at all if the at bat is the one which produced the most debated home run in history. In **Babe Ruth's Called Shot** (Lyons Press) Ed Sherman takes on the long-standing controversy surrounding Ruth's blast off Cubs' pitcher Charlie Root in the third game of the 1932 World Series and fairly examines the home run from every possible angle; including the opinions of numerous eyewitnesses and contemporary experts, plus extensive analysis of the amazing but inconclusive Matt Kangle amateur movie film of the at bat. While the evidence tilts away from the purely factual towards legend, Sherman's thorough investigation is fascinating. // It's a bit shocking to realize it, but Tim Hornbaker's new full-length biography of Charles Comiskey is the first to appear since 1919 (*Commy* by Gustave Axelson). Despite its title which does not sound like a biography, **Turning the Black Sox White** (Sports Publishing) is a welcome reappraisal of Comiskey's life and career as a player, an owner, and a figure of monumental importance in the development of the American League. Bolstered by Bob Hoie's SABR article "1919 Baseball Salaries and the Mythically Underpaid Chicago White Sox" (which is reprinted in the book), Hornbaker in particular defends Comiskey against the charge of being the villain of the Black Sox scandal, lays the blame at the feet of the dishonest players, and by implication rejects unfounded grandstanding calls for Comiskey's removal from the Hall of Fame.



The Sabermetric Revolution

ASSESSING
THE
GROWTH
OF
ANALYTICS
IN
BASEBALL

Benjamin Baumer and Andrew Zimbalist

An Incisive & Important Review of Sabermetrics
& Its Impact on the Development & Management of
ML Teams

by Benjamin Baumer & Andrew Zimbalist.

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