

Dad and Teddy Ballgame

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Dad had a sense of history. It was his gift to be able to project what would be significant in later years. Perhaps that is why he took his three children to a ball game at Fenway Park in 1960.

For quite some time prior to and including that year, the Boston Red Sox were a dreadful team. It was easy to walk up to the ticket window on game day and buy tickets for a family of four without too much trouble. So it was on this particular day when Dad announced to us kids that we were going to see Ted Williams play before he retired.

“Who is Ted Williams?” I asked him.

“Who is *he*? Why, just the best hitter in all of baseball. Maybe, ever. He hit .406 in 1941! Imagine that!”

My sister chimed in, “Is that good, Daddy?”

“It sure is. No one has hit for that average since Teddy Ballgame and no one will again.” Dad was so sure that he smiled and shook his head. “Yes, sir, Teddy Ballgame, the Kid, Sultan of Swat.”

Now all of us three kids looked at Dad and said simultaneously, sounding like owls, “Who?”

He sighed. “Ted Williams. Those are his nicknames. He is such a good, no, **great** ball player. You’ll never see a player like him again. So, we are going to see him play left field.”

My sister and I were so excited that we turned to Mom who had been washing the dishes in the sink and asked, “Are you coming too, Mom?”

Mom chuckled, stopped her washing, and turned to us all, seated around the kitchen table, “No, I’d rather be tied to a bull’s tail and shit to death.”

Whenever Mom used an old farm saying, we knew she was serious but covered her remarks in good humor with fond memories. All of us laughed.

Dad replied, “But Grace, Fenway *Park*, green grass, blue sky. You’d love it.”

“Uh huh. You’ll see a white crow before I go there!” Then she turned back to the sink and resumed her kitchen work.

Chuckie, our older brother by 4 years, asked the obvious question, “So, when are we going? Don’t forget, you promised I could have Albert come over so we could build our

rocket this weekend. You remember, the supplies came in the mail. You picked them up after work and you said me and my buddy could start this Saturday.” All his words came out in a rush, not so much pleading but as a recounting of events.

Dad replied, in a calm but determined voice. “I know, I remember, Chuck. But don’t fret your head. We are going this afternoon so your weekend plans are safe. So get ready, girls and boy. We’re off to Fenway Park!”

After a few moments of giddy laughter, hugs and kisses good-bye to Mom, and one more trip to the bathroom, Dad loaded the three of us kids into the old green Pontiac station wagon and we were raring to go.

Chuck, being the oldest offspring and the boy, sat in the front bench seat while my sister and I sat in the back. There were no seat belts then so one at a time, we could wiggle our way to the middle of the seat, rest our chin on the back of the front seat and ask questions of Dad. Chuck was mostly silent, probably because we did most of the chattering.

“Dad, have you ever seen Ted Williams play?”

“No, this will be the first time for me, too.”

“Why do you like him so much?”

Dad said nothing for a moment. Then slowly and carefully Dad explained to us his admiration for a player he had never seen play. “Ted Williams has hit over 500 home runs. He has a lifetime batting average of around .340. He’s batted in over 1800 runs. But he gave up three years of playing in his prime to serve in the military. Think how many more home runs he could have or ribbies if he had played those years. Do you think any player now would do that? Give up baseball to fly planes for the Marines? No, sirree. Too much money for some of these bums to give it all up. Teddy Ballgame is someone ...”

His voice trailed off.

At the time, we thought he was paying attention to the traffic which had become steady and heavy as our car approached Kenmore Square. There were so many people walking briskly along the sidewalks toward the stadium. Dad maneuvered the ‘green bomb’ into a parking space off Lansdowne Street. Then the three of us gleefully followed Dad up to the ticket booth where he purchased four tickets in the grandstand.

As we entered the Park, the smells of popcorn and hot dogs intermingled with the stench of beer and urine. It was all overwhelming and wonderful. We walked from the dark, dank concourse, up the cement ramp to see the beautifully green diamond revealed to us in all its glory. There, rising to a height of 37 feet, was the ‘Green Monster’, an imposing wall feared by hitters and fielders alike. It was no mean feat to be able to clock one over that. And that space was Ted Williams’ playground. Awesome.

As memories come and go, neither my sister nor I remember much about the ballgame. We think the Red Sox won the game. My sister remembers, though, that Number 9 hit a double off the center field wall. I remember feeling sad that *he* did not hit a home run.

Time has passed since our first trip into Boston. Mom and Dad have passed and brother Chuck lives with his wife out of state. But this was the year Sis and I were going to see some spring training games. Just as if we were kids again, we booked our trip, selected the flight, rented a car, all raring to go to Florida. Fort Myers is located on the southwest coast of Florida and is spring home of the Boston Red Sox. That was our destination.

With camera in hand, we walked down the sidewalk to City of Palms Park, a delightful little ball field just minutes from downtown Fort Myers. In place of fetid cement ramps or dungy corners to avoid, the park was open, bright, and breezy. No beer spilled on the sidewalks. Certainly a different experience than the memory filtered by our young and eager souls so long ago.

The bougainvillea were in bloom, vibrantly red and luxuriant. A warm, slightly humid breeze greeted us as we turned the corner and stood in front of the Park. There in the plaza, immortalized in bronze, stood a statue of Ted Williams with his bat slung over his left shoulder. With his right hand he was placing a baseball cap on the head of a young boy. The boy was reaching out for the cap with such a look of delight on his face that it was almost painful to observe.

The day was turning slightly heavy but our hearts were light. We took each other's picture by Teddy Ballgame. Dad would have been proud.