

special issue

july sixteen,

twenty-fourteen

COBALT

(baseball)

LINEUP CARD

AWAY TEAM

SS	David Salner	Poetry "Opening Day"	1
LF	Michael Mah	Nonfiction "Top 10 Oakland A's Prospects"	2
3B	Jennifer A. Howard	Fiction "The Lesser Coverts of Game Birds"	5
1B	Ken Waldman	Poetry "Twin Killing"	25
DH	Nick Kocz	Fiction "What We Remember About the Great Loves of Our Life"	26
CF	Zach Mankofsky	Fiction "Death of a Cubs Fan"	30
C	Liz Dolan	Poetry "The House that Ruth Built"	40
2B	Michael Begnal	Poetry "At the Grave of Josh Gibson"	56
RF	Patricia C. Smith	Fiction "Holy Ghost"	58
SP	Joshua Isard	Nonfiction "Write Like Roy Pitches"	65

LINEUP CARD

HOME TEAM

2B	April Johnston	Flash Fiction “I Dream of Ty Cobb”	7
CF	Marjorie Maddox	Poetry “The Called Shot”	8
RF	Ray Morrison	Fiction “Rub”	10
DH	Garrett Brown	Nonfiction “Galileo in the Uecker Seats”	42
C	Nikki Thompson	Poetry “Dodger Blues”	49
3B	Colin Rafferty	Nonfiction “Box Score (#41)”	52
1B	Ron Wallace	Poetry “Death of a Left Fielder”	54
RF	Natalie C. Sampson	Fiction “Stone Dust and Lucky Clovers”	68
SS	Sandra Marchetti	Poetry “Field in Winter”	73
SP	Alethea Gerding	Fiction “The Ghosts of Cooperstown”	74
		Contributor Bios	82
		Publication Notes	85

DAVID SALNER

OPENING DAY

I helped the sexton's son, Russell,
bury old Ginny Mummert one day in mid-April.
I remember the softness of the spring air and the hint
of manure from somebody spreading maybe a mile off.
It was opening day, and the Orioles were on the air.
We put the portable radio by the water jug
and draped the antenna over somebody's stone,
but we couldn't hear much except static
and the sound of dirt on the casket.

We were almost done with Ginny
when the Orioles got runners on base
in the eighth inning, so we stopped our work
and hovered over the radio, listening hard
for each crackling word. And if you didn't know
we were pulling for Gus Triandos to hit the long ball,
you might have thought it was our gentle send-off
for Ginny. Godspeed. But the Birds never scored.

MICHAEL MAH

TOP 10 OAKLAND A'S PROSPECTS

1. Addison Russell, SS. In the throes of the internet, it's that time of year when we can hardly wait for someone else to put the Oakland Athletics' Top 10 prospects in proper order. The top of the list is a no-brainer. Tools, skills, young for his league, and he's going to stick at short. I have never seen motion video of an infielder approximating what I believe Addison Russell to look like, but I have to say I've never seen anything like him in the green and gold since Eric Chavez or Miguel Tejada.

Update: On July 4th, the Cubs acquired Addison Russell and Billy McKinney (spoiler alert: #3 on this list) for pitchers Jeff Samardzija and Jason Hammel. A risky trade; your author got word late that night and acted as if a child had been ripped from his arms.

2. Daniel Robertson, SS/3B. It is a wonder just how much has been made free. But in a democracy of information, expertise becomes subjective. This is only natural and disastrous. Not to mention circular. Rather often the true concern of such expertise (i.e., on the Oakland farm system) is revealed to be but excess aplomb with the internet itself. The effect can be overstated, but I really do think we care about what other people think more than any human population ever has. Someone out there thinks Daniel Robertson has a short swing. It's a fact that many assume he'll have to move to third. So he must have the arm.

3. Billy McKinney is an outfielder drafted out of high school in Texas. He hit 326/387/437 in his first 55 professional games. You could have looked that up anywhere. It's freely available information. If we can no longer have expertise, the best we can hope for, oddly enough, is *authority*.

4. Bobby Wahl, RHP. You don't have to measure your life the way a baseball player does his career, but just in case you want to: you'd rather be an

MICHAEL MAH

exceptional talent as early as high school. There's nothing wrong with college, but, preferably, you should find no compelling reason to go. You want to debut by 22 or 23. You want to know what you're doing by then, because the average age of one's finest year is a quick turnaround: 27. Where your physical peak meets the learning curve. After that, you want to get by on experience, cultivated skills: power, discipline, savvy. At 35, even a natural could be done, and we haven't discussed what your ultimate upside ("ceiling," the ideal best you could have done with yourself) was in the first place. Bobby Wahl is 21.2 innings out of college. He could be anything. I could have been anything. But turns out that, at his age, I was already most of what I turned out to be. Maybe Bobby Wahl is the same, and he struck out 11.6/9 in a small sample.

5. Raul Alcantara, RHP. What do you do with your brain? There's room in my brain for Raul Alcantara's miniscule walk rate. But what do you do with the rest if you're not inclined to set more and more of it aside for baseball? Do you have to think about the nature of art that entire time? Do you have to stifle lusts that would otherwise swallow your life whole? What about consider your responsibilities to others? Deprived of being able to simply care about who wins, do you have to think about what right you have to think what you think? What constant panic! Bless you.

6. Billy Burns, OF. Fast, and a potential WAR monster in center if defensive metrics are to be believed. Baseball is a set of information. It's vast, but subject to mastery in a way that other passions are not. The information is discrete: the names of the players, numbers. There are game concepts but no moral questions. To establish fluency in other spheres means that you have to defend what you know about data-mining, or the Middle East. You have to question the tactical aggression of the Democratic Party. You have to be out of your depths. Not that sports is without unfounded opinion. Just the opposite. It's more like everyone involved understands how little their opinion matters. Sports chat is purer for it. We all know where the field is. There are lines which, if close to being crossed, kick up a cloud of chalk.

MICHAEL MAH

7. Nolan Sanburn, RHP. So goes the prevailing rhetoric that if I part with consensus at any point, I'll be overrating, or underrating, a prospect. I think we can enrich our spirit, and our language, if we never use these hurtful terms again. It might be strange to see Nolan Sanburn here—I don't know if he has two pitches, much less the three he needs to start—but his floor is providing high-leverage relief innings, while Matt Olson and Renato Nunez, with those kind of ratios, will become data points about the importance of discipline, even in youth.

8. Michael Ynoa, RHP. Last splash in the unregulated Dominican market, arm trouble, “beautiful eyes,” according to Santiago Casilla. In the event that you do not watch a game at seven, and another on the west coast at ten, your evening is spent taking in some other part of our culture; the internet, literature, a movie, golden-age TV. And you wake up in the morning, freshly recapped, to find yourself, according to many critics, a philistine and a racist. How dare you, sir.

9. B.J. Boyd, OF. In a sense, the culture has caught up with sports fandom. It seems it has gotten more difficult to explain or justify what one does with their time. As a reflex, we disclaim our need to watch, to validate, to know, as irrational. We feel the lowered bar of our obsessions. But I think we're channeling a drive which has been for so many of us ably sated by picking which ball they like to see in the air, supporting the franchise nearest their hometown, and relenting to a particular vulnerability, one which savors small victories and shakes off inevitable losses. I really think the rest of you are on the boards at Reddit, wrongfully accusing someone of murder. Just watch the game.

10. Chris Kohler, LHP. Follow something. Let it operate without your contribution. Reacquaint yourself with caring about that which has nothing to do with you. Can you believe it? At some point, this was recognizably human behavior. And then I had to go and rank Kohler, from baseball hotbed and confirmed real place Rancho Cucamonga, tenth among Oakland Athletics prospects.

JENNIFER A. HOWARD

THE LESSER COVERTS OF GAME BIRDS

By the time the days got so short in Lakeland, Florida, that the Detroit Tigers could only practice in the sunshine from eleven till one, the birds were thoroughly confused. Instead of heading north for spring, they flew east and south-southwest. And then up. The arctic terns, accustomed to long treks from Greenland to Antarctica and back every year, were the first to reach the moon. The waxwings arrived next, landing atop micrometeoroids and other space debris to mate and send on new generations. The crested honey buzzards and loons followed. After not many years, there were no birds at all on earth.

That's the story my husband and I told our daughters. In truth, nobody knew why the birds all died while the rest of the world—caribou and dandelions and Chinese trumpetfish and fruit flies and people—survived the blackout. Now, the world's teenagers have never seen a live seagull, though it took a good while after the birds were gone for folks to stop saying everything tasted like chicken.

After their dad died in a torchbearing accident, I had to define *blue jays* and *orioles* and *cardinals* to my girls by myself. Eagles I could remember and sketch for the girls when they were little, and ravens and sea hawks, though only in team-colored cartoon profiles with go-get-em looks in the one eye. When my oldest got picked up by the minor league Toledo Mud Hens, I had to do some research. Mud hens, aka the American coot, looked like white-billed ducks but tasted—the histories said—more like crane. They would steal other birds' food and feed it to their prettiest chicks and sometimes drop their eggs in strange nests for someone else to raise. In broad daylight! The collective was either a cover of coots or covert of coots. A *t*, I guess, was either added, or it was lost, along the way.

But I told the girls the mud hens had been fierce mothers, kind sisters. Loyal. Territorial. Funny. Expansion teams never adopted mascots that fit the new, dark world. No Duluth Night Monkeys or Spokane Sugar Gliders. No hockey teams with evening primrose or luminescent fungi logos. No

JENNIFER A. HOWARD

middle school gerbil mascots, or hermit crabs or paradoxical frogs. Not even the wombats and hedgehogs found clubs to represent. Phoenix is still the Suns. The Avalanche did change their name after the growing snowslide death tolls, but they went nostalgic (and without regard to national boundaries) when they came out as the Colorado Puerto Rican Woodpeckers.

Today, my Mud Hen daughter has been pitching fastballs, over and over, asking for trouble. She's angry that boy made her do the leaving by going to bed with the center fielder when they were out of town for an away game. She's even angrier he left like she wanted him to. Her sister next to me in the bleachers whispers, Change up, change up. She doesn't mix it up, though. The batter, he connects, and the ball goes flying, whistling out of the field into the dark of the stands—my sweet kid—like it's got somebody to catch up to.

My husband died on a commuter route, just trying to get nurses to work safe. Or he was getting one nurse to work safe. Or, he didn't even die. I'm not sure.

Now that it's dark all the time, I'll tell her after the game, we can't know if anybody is really gone, or if we just can't see them right now. The truth is we can't know much anymore, we can't make out anything clearly, or in real color. Black twig borers ate up all our coffee beans, so we never really feel awake. We talk to each other like we're all still mid-dream, half-dreamt, and we never get all the way out of our pajamas or let down our nighttime ponytails. We reach back for talismans that no longer represent us because we can't see where we're headed. Maybe all that's right anymore is getting under the covers with whoever's next to you, even if the person you love is somewhere else, and an occasional trip to the ballpark: to reel and stagger in the floodlights, maybe to even the score.

APRIL JOHNSTON

I DREAM OF TY COBB

I met him in a coffee shop. I was the barista, wearing a white apron and a visor with an attached hair net. He was the customer. I made him a half-caff, extra wet cappuccino that wasn't to his liking and, when he complained, I didn't offer enough concern.

"Do you know who I am?"

"No."

"I'm the greatest ballplayer of all time" he huffed.

Then he asked to speak with my manager.

Ty Cobb was like that.

MARJORIE MADDOX

THE CALLED SHOT *THE 1932 WORLD SERIES*

Chicago is Chicago; October, October;
the Yankees, the Yankees;
and ultimately, the Babe, the Babe,
so, of course, wind wrapped itself around Wrigley,
the way myth begins as breeze,
builds into a billowing funnel
that sweeps up ball parks and bleachers,
hot dogs and historians,
fans and photographers,
even commentators and called shots
into its whirling swirl of miracle.

“Why don’t you just read the papers?
It’s all in the papers,” Babe told Frick
and his denial-turned-maybe-turned-sure-
I-pointed-and-predicted-just-like-that
didn’t make the homer any more than its 440 or so
stretch of the swing that smacked our imaginations
past Charlie Root, past the heroic
into the mythic proportions
of Bambino-sized expectations.

The film from that spring-wound Kodak? Watch it again
and again and once more for the sake
of authenticity and the decades since ’32,
and who’s to say hype and hope
won’t take over your hindsight eyesight
that can send even mustard-sized visions of winning
soaring out of the ballpark?

MARJORIE MADDOX

As any born-in-his-pinstripes or
birthed-in-her-ball-cap real fan knows,
facts only float you so far,
then it's the dream that whisks you away,
carries you high over the field and past the fence
into what you want to believe.

Sometimes the underdog orphan
becomes the legend; sometimes
the hysterical historical
is just a homer
that the Whirlwind
of Swat makes you swear—
as sure as baseball is baseball—
you heard the Lucky Bum himself call out,
“Way past dem bleachers, that's where,”
his finger holding up
that eternal number one,
inning after inning
after inning.

You want to believe? Take a seat.
The game's not over yet.

RAY MORRISON

RUB

Chase Ritter stared at the blank spaces on the lineup card and sighed. He reached for the smudged glass that sat on the desk next to the card and tilted it to his lips. The glass was empty. Ritter looked long at it, as though he couldn't figure out how it had been drained. He slid open one of the desk's drawers to retrieve the bottle of Wild Turkey. He poured the whiskey until the glass was half-full, hesitated, then filled it to the top. Ritter gulped a third of the whiskey and winced when it hit his stomach, trying to ignore what he knew it was doing to his ulcer. Tucking the bottle back into the drawer, he closed it with his knee. He lit a cigarette, placed his hands behind his head and leaned back.

For a minor league baseball manager, the measure of success is not the number of games won and lost. His main value, what made Ritter important to the St. Louis Cardinals, the Red Birds' Major League parent club, was how well he could take the raw talent he was given (and in which so much had already been invested) and mold those young possibles into big league material. Of course, while winning games didn't define his success, it did determine whether he'd have a job.

Ritter stared at the cracked paint and rust stains on the ceiling in his cramped office at Ernie Shore Field and sucked smoke deep into his lungs, releasing it through his nose. With just over three hours before game time, he tried to focus on getting his lineup in order but he couldn't help thinking about what a difference one year makes. This time last year, he was managing the Winnipeg Goldeneyes toward victory in the Northern League championship. That accomplishment had been rewarded with a promotion to the Class B Carolina League (and the distinctly warmer climate of North Carolina) as the skipper of the Winston-Salem Red Birds. Unfortunately, under his tutelage the Birds were dead last in their division, foundering with a twelve game losing streak. Ritter had only one decent bat on his team, Eddie Olivares, and he'd shuffled the rest every way he knew how to try and spark the offense. For a moment, he considered putting

RAY MORRISON

himself in the lineup, but he knew it was just the Wild Turkey talking. The real problem, Ritter knew, was his pitching.

He leaned forward, stubbed out the Pall Mall in an overflowing ashtray, and picked up his fountain pen. Ritter wrote Olivares' name in the number-four batting position. He scratched his stubbly cheek with the cap end of the pen and then filled in the rest of the players' names alphabetically. What the hell; he hadn't tried that yet. He lifted the lineup card and held it at arms' length, as though it were smeared with bubonic plague. As he considered the ramifications of this capricious act, there was a knock on the door. Ritter waved the card to dry the ink and set the lineup for the night.

"Come on in," Ritter called.

A tall teenager with a crew cut, his face dotted with acne, poked the top half of his gangly frame through the door.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Ritter, sir. The umpires are askin' for the balls. They got to rub 'em down."

"It's okay, son. I ain't gonna bite you."

Ritter stood and had to wait a moment for the room to stop swaying. He could see the boy watching him with a touch of alarm on his face and Ritter thought *I should bite him*. He walked over to a short oak cabinet pushed against the side wall and fished a key ring from his pocket. He unlocked the padlock securing a metal hasp and swung open the door. The cabinet was not tall, but it was deep, with six shelves. On the top shelf were some stationery supplies, as well as two sealed bottles of Wild Turkey. Ritter leaned back to make sure the boy hadn't ventured into the room. On the four bottom shelves were boxes of new Carolina League baseballs. Prior to each game, the umpires had to rub down six-dozen balls with special mud to remove the slick sheen so that the pitchers and players could throw the ball without it slipping. Ritter removed three boxes and walked them over to the boy.

"Here you go, kid. I'll bring the other three in a few minutes. I gotta head over to get dressed, anyway."

"Yes, sir. I'll tell the umps."

The kid vanished and Ritter slid out three more boxes of baseballs. He

RAY MORRISON

wanted another belt of whiskey but knew he'd pushed it too far already. He relocked the cabinet, slipped the hopeful lineup card into his shirt pocket and headed for the locker room.

The noise in the Red Birds' locker room was a painful counterpoint to the quiet of Ritter's office. His dull headache swelled with the cacophony of laughter, hoots and yelling from the ballplayers, who were in varying stages of dressing for the game. On a bench, a transistor radio blared the tinny sound of Dion and the Belmonts singing "Where or When."

Ritter waved toward his team before heading toward an area that was curtained off at the near end of the clubhouse. Behind the curtain was one large locker that the umpires shared. A card table had been set up in front of it with two folding chairs. When Ritter stepped into this area, the two umpires, both still in their street clothes, were sitting at the table, preparing the game's balls. In their cupped hands, stained dark brown from the mud, the balls spun rhythmically and smoothly. After the mud was spread to their satisfaction, they'd drop the balls in a bag on the floor, dip their fingers into a large tin of Lena's Rubbing Mud positioned in the center of the table, grab a new ball and repeat the forty-five second process. Ritter placed the three boxes of balls he was carrying on the far edge of the table.

"Here you go, gentlemen."

"Thanks, Chase," one of the umps said. He was the older of the two, a fellow named Tommy whom Ritter had known for years. The other umpire was just a kid, same age of most of his players, but Ritter couldn't recall his name.

"No problem," Ritter said. "And if it's not too much trouble, could you rub a little luck into those balls today? God knows we need it."

"Hey, we rub luck into the balls *every* game," Tommy said. "Thing is, we don't always know which team gets it."

The younger umpire laughed out loud, but Ritter just grinned and nodded. He certainly knew which teams had been getting the luck lately.

There was a knock on the locker room door. Ritter tossed a quick salute to the umpires and went to answer it. When he opened the door, he was surprised to see his wife standing there with a boy next to her who Ritter

RAY MORRISON

didn't recognize. The boy was holding Mrs. Ritter's hand and looking down at his sneakers.

"Evelyn, what are you doing here? You know you can't come in here while the boys are dressing."

Her long hair was done up in an elaborate style Ritter had never seen, and the fluorescent light of the hallway revealed a red color that was not present when he'd left the house that morning. Evidently, while he had been fretting over his lineup, she'd been at the beauty parlor.

"I don't need to come in, Charles." She stood looking at her husband with a long, knowing look, waiting. After a minute she put her free hand on her hip and shook her head. "You don't remember, do you?"

"Remember what?" Ritter glanced back into the locker room. Most of the players had stopped talking and were looking in his direction. Brenda Lee's "I'm Sorry" was drifting from the radio.

"I swear, Charles, you never, ever listen to what I say. Do you ever hear what I say?" Her voice was rising and Ritter noticed large red patches on each side of her neck he'd seen so many times before. Secretly, he thought they were cute.

Ritter stepped into the hallway and closed the door behind him. When he did, Evelyn Ritter wrinkled her nose, tilted her head slightly toward her husband and sniffed. She raised one eyebrow and shook her head.

"I can smell how "busy" you are, Charles."

"You have no idea, Ev. So, what did I forgot now?"

She nodded down at the boy, who hadn't moved or looked up. Ritter looked at him for the first time. The boy was thin, even frail to Ritter's mind, with hair and eyebrows so blond they were almost white. A long cowlick jutted up at the back of the boy's head that reminded Ritter of Dennis the Menace.

Ritter looked back at his wife. He raised his eyebrows and shoulders in unison.

"This is Craig. Phyllis Bloomfield's son. The one I told you about." She nodded again, two times quickly, her eyes widened. "Re-mem-ber?" She drew out the last word, her frustration evident.

"Umm..." Ritter racked his brain, but came up blank.

RAY MORRISON

“He’s been in and out of the hospital. We talked about it last weekend.”

“Oh, yeah. You mean the kid with the brain...” Ritter stopped when he realized what he was saying.

“He’s just got some health problems, dear. He doesn’t talk much, but he loves baseball. I told Phyllis you’d give Craig a tour of the ballpark and let him meet the players.”

From inside the room, Ritter heard Eddie Olivares shout, “Fuck you, Harris!”

“You know, Ev, this just isn’t a good time. We got to get dressed and I got to run BP in a few minutes. Maybe some other time.”

As soon as Ritter said this, Craig turned and tried to pull Evelyn Ritter away. She gave a slight tug to stop him, then fixed Ritter with her chestnut-colored eyes before speaking to the child.

“It’s all right, Craig. Mr. Ritter was only teasing. He’d love to show you the ballpark.” She turned back toward Chase and gave him a look he’d seen many times before. “Wouldn’t you, darling?”

Ritter looked at the boy, who was still trying to pull his wife away. If there was one thing Chase Ritter knew well, it was when he had lost.

“Hey, Craig,” Ritter said, “I was just joshin’. How’d you like to meet the team and walk around the field?”

“And you can even watch the whole game from the dugout today,” Evelyn added.

Ritter snapped his head toward her, but he knew it was settled. “Um, yeah...how would that be, Craig?”

Craig stopped tugging and turned slowly. He continued staring at his feet, but after a few seconds, he nodded.

“Good,” Evelyn said. “Now you go with Mr. Ritter and he’ll show you the time of your life.” Evelyn extended the boy’s hand she was holding toward her husband and Ritter took it. “You boys have fun. Just bring Craig home with you, Charles. Phyllis and I are going dress shopping.”

Ritter started to protest, but knew it would be no more than a formality. “Sure thing, honey.”

He watched his wife walk down the hall and turn the corner. He stood and listened until the sound of her heels clicking on the concrete floor

RAY MORRISON

faded and disappeared.

“Well, come on in, kid,” Ritter said.

To Ritter’s throbbing head, the noise level seemed to have trebled since he’d stepped outside. He needed some aspirin. When he glanced toward the players’ lockers, there were two members of his team holding down a young player who’d just been called up from Winnipeg that week. They’d put the kid’s jersey on him backward and Olivares was buttoning it up the back. The poor victim had a jock strap tied around his head and he was naked from the waist down. Ritter saw that Craig, who’d finally looked up, was watching the hazing with rapt attention.

“Tell you what, kid. Let’s go over here and I’ll let you meet the umpires.”

Ritter led Craig around the curtain to where the umpires were still rubbing down the balls. He introduced the boy to the men and explained to the boy what they were doing. Craig stepped closer to the table to watch. His head followed Tommy’s hands as the umpire dipped two fingers into the tin of mud, which to Craig looked like chocolate pudding, scooping a small amount before dabbing some into his palm. A new ball was taken from the box and the precise rolling between the hands began anew. When Tommy finished the ball, he held it out so Craig could take a look at it. The bright, white sheen was gone, replaced by a dull tan. Tommy dropped it in the bag with the others.

“Would you like to try?” Tommy asked the boy.

Craig looked up at Ritter. The boy’s mouth hung slightly open and he blinked slowly.

“Go ahead, Craig. Try it.”

Tommy helped the boy dip his forefinger and middle finger into to the mud and showed him how to smear it in the palm just right. He unwrapped a new ball and gave it to Craig.

“Now cradle it between both hands like this,” Tommy said, grabbing another ball to demonstrate. “The secret is to use your thumbs to control the rotation and to spread the mud evenly.” He demonstrated again. In the man’s hands, the task seemed effortless.

Craig tried to imitate the motions but had trouble keeping the ball moving in his smaller hands. Tommy, who Ritter noticed was far more patient with

RAY MORRISON

the kid than he ever was with ballplayers, adjusted Craig's thumbs a bit and helped him start again. This time, Craig managed to do a pretty good job of rolling the ball. When he finished, the end result was not perfect—there were a couple dark spots where the mud hadn't thinned—but it was quite good. Craig stared at his work for a long time and then offered it to Tommy.

"You keep it as a souvenir," Tommy said.

Craig looked again at Ritter, who nodded and saw Craig smile for the first time.

"All right, kid," Ritter said. "I gotta get dressed now. We got us a game to play, after all."

Ritter thanked the umpires and led Craig back to the locker room proper so he could put on his uniform and finally get some aspirin.

At the conclusion of batting practice, before the start of the game, Ritter gave Craig a quick tour of the ball field, even letting him stand on the pitcher's mound, something that elicited the boy's second smile of the day. Craig never spoke as he followed Ritter around, just continuously rolled his baseball in his hands.

When the game started, Ritter sat Craig at the far end of the bench in the Red Birds' dugout. He explained to the boy that he needed to stay in the dugout and not venture out onto the field until the game was over.

That Sunday afternoon, the sun was bright and hot in a cloudless, dazzling blue sky. In spite of the losing streak, there was a decent crowd at the game. Ritter watched his young pitcher take the mound and hoped the fickle gods of baseball were done torturing him.

By the third inning, it was clear they were not. The Birds' pitcher, a nineteen year-old kid from Iowa named Arthur Lewis, had no strikeouts and had walked in two of the Durham Bulls' eight runs. Ritter leaned out of the dugout and looked down the right field sidelines to check the status of his relief pitcher's warm up. He got a nod from his assistant and Ritter climbed the two steps out of the dugout, waved to Tommy for timeout, and made the long walk out to the mound. When he stepped up the hill, he put his hand on Lewis's shoulder.

"How's the arm feeling, Artie?"

RAY MORRISON

“Good, Skip. I just can’t seem to get my usual movement on the ball.”

“It happens, kid. Just not your day,” Ritter said. He extended his hand to take the ball from Lewis. “Get ‘em next time.”

Ritter raised his left arm and tapped the wrist to signal for his left-handed reliever. He watched Lewis walk toward the dugout, shoulders slumped. When the new pitcher trotted out, Ritter handed him the ball and turned toward the catcher, who’d said nothing the entire time.

“After Jack’s warm up tosses, get Tommy to give you a new ball. This one’s clearly no good.”

A trickle of sweat ran down the back of Ritter’s neck as he made his way back to the dugout. He glanced down its length. No one looked in his direction and the dugout was silent. Ritter looked at Craig in the near corner. The boy was the only one smiling. The kid was staring out at the field, still rolling his souvenir baseball in his palm.

By the seventh inning stretch, the Red Birds had barely slowed the Bulls’ scoring, and trailed by a score of thirteen to one. In their half of the inning, Ritter watched his first two batters go down on strikeouts. While the next player moved into the batter’s box, Ritter tried to decide whether to bring in his fifth pitcher at the top of the eighth, wondering if it even mattered at this point. The batter hit a weak grounder directly to the first baseman, who stepped on the bag for the third out.

As the Red Birds took the field, Tommy, the home plate umpire, signaled toward the Birds’ dugout for some replacement balls. Ritter watched the ball boy scoop four balls from the bag and jog onto the field. From the corner of his eye, Ritter noticed Craig gesturing toward him. When he turned, Craig was holding his baseball out toward him and nodding.

“Thanks, kid,” Ritter said. “We got plenty. Keep your ball.”

Craig shook his head and stood up. He walked over to Ritter and extended the ball toward him. “You should use it.”

Ritter was so taken aback by hearing the boy speak as much as by his odd statement, that he reached down and took the ball. “Okay. Thanks, kid.”

When Ritter turned back toward the field, the Bulls’ first batter of the inning stepped up to the plate. He drove the first pitch in a high arc over

RAY MORRISON

the centerfield wall for a home run. Ritter dropped his head and shook it. He looked at the baseball Craig had handed him, then stepped out of the dugout and called for time.

Rather than heading for the mound, Ritter walked toward home plate and signaled to Tommy that he wanted to talk to him. The umpire, a bit confused, met the Red Birds' manager halfway between the dugout and home plate.

"What is it, Chase?"

"I just wanted to give you a new ball to use."

"I got plenty for now. If I need more, you know I'll signal."

Ritter looked up in the stands. There were only about half as many fans now as had been present at the start of the game.

"Yeah, but this is the one you gave that kid." Ritter nodded toward Craig, who was standing at the bottom of the dugout steps. "He wants it to be used in the game. I figure at least someone on our side should have a good day today. Whatcha say?"

"I guess it's a small thing," Tommy said. "Let me have it."

Ritter handed the umpire Craig's ball. Tommy examined it carefully to make sure it hadn't been tampered with, and nodded. Ritter thanked him and walked back to the dugout. He rubbed Craig on the head and thought of how he was going to milk this with Evelyn when he got home. Ritter watched Tommy slip the ball into the catcher's mitt and swap it for the one being used.

The Bulls' next batter struck out on three pitches. When Ritter looked down at Craig, the boy was grinning. The next two batters went down on easy pop flies.

In the bottom half of the eighth, the Red Birds hit the ball well, always ground balls or line drives that seemed to just miss the outstretched glove of the fielders. By the time they made three outs, Winston-Salem had managed to hit three new Bulls' pitchers well and to score nine runs, which closed the gap to fifteen to ten.

Only a couple hundred fans were still at Ernie Shore Field at the end of the game, but those that were talked about the amazing comeback victory of

RAY MORRISON

the Red Birds for days. To many, the loss by the Durham Bulls was due to a sudden, inexplicable collapse of the Bulls' defense, while some credited the resilience and tenacity of the young Winston-Salem ballplayers.

To the Red Birds' manager, however, the answer was simple. It was magic.

Chase Ritter arranged with Craig's parents for him to be present at every home game. The boy's parents quickly agreed to the arrangement, noting how much happier their son seemed after he went to the games. It got to where Ritter actually looked forward to driving over to the boy's house to pick him up on the way to the ballpark. Although the conversations were generally one-sided, Ritter enjoyed teaching Craig about the subtleties of baseball during their commute to the ballpark. The Ritters had tried several years back to have children of their own, but they never had any luck, so Chase enjoyed the opportunity to bond with the boy.

And Ritter always managed to have him in the clubhouse in time to help the umpires rub down the baseballs. Ritter arranged a separate bag where Craig would drop the balls he'd rubbed. The boy had become so proficient, that had anyone been shown one of the balls prepared by Craig and one rubbed by an umpire, no one would be able to tell a difference. Before long, Craig was nicknamed "Rub."

The following three weeks, the Red Birds played eighteen games, of which twelve were home games. Since that remarkable comeback against the Durham Bulls, the Red Birds played their best baseball ever. Whenever the team started to give up runs, or make too many defensive errors, Ritter would reach into the bag containing Rub's special balls and send them into the game. The Birds would then begin hitting well and making amazing plays in the field. During this stretch, Winston-Salem won every home game. Coupled with fair success on the road, they'd manage to come within two games of first place with two weeks remaining in the season. If their streak continued, Ritter knew his team would make the playoffs and could even bring home the championship.

At ten o'clock on the Saturday morning of the Red Birds' final home stand, Chase Ritter stood in front of his bedroom mirror and squeezed a dab of Brylcreem into his palm. He rubbed his hands together to spread it and then smoothed it into his thinning hair. He worked the part until it was

RAY MORRISON

good and straight and patted his head to set his hair in place. Ritter thought he looked rather distinguished. He adjusted the knot of his tie, pulled on his suit jacket and headed out to the Bloomfields' home.

When he arrived, Al Bloomfield's Chevy was not in the driveway. Al frequently had accompanied his son and Ritter to the games in the past month, but Ritter guessed that the Rub's father had other plans that day. Chase rang the doorbell and waited, but there was no answer. He rang two more times, knocked as well, but it became clear that no one was home. As he walked back toward his car, a woman in a light pink housecoat, her hair up in large, bulky rollers, called to him from the house across the street.

"The Bloomfields aren't home."

"I sorta figured that out." Ritter couldn't hide his frustration.

"It's Craig," she said. "They took him to the hospital."

Ritter looked at the woman like she had just spoken Greek. He'd just seen the boy the night before last and he'd looked fine.

"Which hospital?" Ritter asked.

"Baptist, I think."

Ritter checked his watch. He needed to get to the ballpark, but instead drove to Baptist Hospital. He checked with Reception and they told him the Bloomfields were on the fifth floor, the pediatric ICU. Ritter was not a religious man, but as he rode the elevator up, he said a prayer that Rub was okay. He found the boy's parents in the waiting area. Mrs. Bloomfield was in her robe and slippers, with no makeup and her hair hidden under a scarf. Several strands poked from the edges. Her husband was unshaven and his shirt was untucked. When Ritter walked over to them, they looked up. Phyllis Bloomfield started crying.

"This morning, when Phyllis went to get Craig dressed to go to the game, he wouldn't wake up," Al Bloomfield said. "They say he's in a coma from the tumor."

Al Bloomfield choked up on the last word and grabbed his wife like a drowning man would a life preserver. Ritter reached down and lay a hand on each of their shoulders.

"I am so sorry." Ritter sat down in a hard plastic seat across from the grieving couple. "Do they think he'll be okay?"

RAY MORRISON

Neither parent spoke, but the way Al Bloomfield looked at Ritter was answer enough. Ritter sat for a while and then went to find a pay phone to call Evelyn. After his wife told him she would meet him there, Chase called Buck Gallagher, his pitching coach and second-in-command, to tell him about Rub and that Gallagher was going to run the game today.

For four hours, the Bloomfields and Ritters sat in the chilly, quiet waiting area. Periodically, a nurse would come out to inform them that there was no change. Ritter tried to read, but couldn't concentrate. He wondered how things were going at Ernie Shore Field, and it surprised him to realize he didn't particularly care.

Around four-thirty, a doctor came and told the Bloomfields that Craig had regained consciousness and that they could see him. The doctor warned them that his apparent recovery could be short-lived and not to be too optimistic. Rub's parents hurried away to see their son. Ritter took his wife's hand and squeezed it.

"Maybe this was just a bad scare, you think?" he asked Evelyn.

"Maybe. I'm praying harder than I ever have, that's for sure."

Ritter nodded and leaned back. He hated the sharp, antiseptic smell of the hospital and lit a cigarette to help dispel it. As he shook out the match, Al Bloomfield came through the ward door and approached him.

"Chase, he's asking for you. We hadn't even mentioned to Craig that you were here. He just seemed to know."

Ritter looked at Evelyn, who had fresh tears in her eyes. He had fought in Korea, but Ritter wasn't sure he was ever as frightened as he was at that moment. When he turned back to Al, he was certain he couldn't stand. But he did. He handed the cigarette to his wife and started to follow Rub's father. Just before they reached the ward door, Ritter put out a hand and grabbed the other man's arm.

"Just a minute, Al. Which room is he in?"

"Through this door, then second door on the right. Why?"

"I'll be right in. I just gotta get something."

Ritter jogged over to the elevator and punched the down button repeatedly. He stared at the numbers above the door. They didn't seem to be moving. Ritter hurried to the stairwell and took the steps two at a time all the way

RAY MORRISON

to the ground floor. He ran outside to the parking lot, panicking when he forgot where he'd parked. He found the Rambler and fumbled to get the keys from his pocket. He went to the trunk and opened it. Inside were assorted notebooks and various items of baseball equipment. Ritter shoved things around until he found what he was searching for. He snatched it up, then slammed the trunk closed.

By the time he climbed the stairs back to the fifth floor, Ritter was out of breath. He had to lean with his hands on his knees for a moment. A nurse approached him and asked if he was okay. He couldn't speak and waved her off with one hand. After his heart rate slowed, Ritter stood up. When he walked past the waiting area, smiled at his wife, but didn't say anything. He paused a moment before pushing open the ward door.

When Ritter entered Rub's room, he couldn't see the boy because the Bloomfields were standing between him and the bed, blocking his view. Rub's parents turned, and then moved to the end of the bed to give Ritter room.

The boy's eyes were closed, and Ritter feared the worst. He stepped to the bed and was shocked at how pale Rub's skin was. And how small the kid looked lying in the middle of the large bed. Intravenous tubing ran from a bottle of clear fluid hanging from a stand on the other side of the bed into Rub's thin left arm. Ritter jumped when Mrs. Bloomfield spoke.

"Craig, honey, Mr. Ritter is here."

For a few moments, the boy did nothing, but then slowly blinked.

"He can't see, Chase," Al Bloomfield said. "But he hears fine."

Rub's head tilted toward Ritter, but his eyes remained fixed on the ceiling. The pupils were wide and black. The boy reached his right arm up, angled in the baseball manager's direction. Chase took the small hand in his own. The boy's skin was cold as ice. Ritter bit his lower lip hard.

"Hey, kid, how you doin'?" It felt as though someone had poured cement down Chase's throat.

Rub smiled and Chase felt the boy's fingers press softly into his hand. Ritter glanced at the boy's parents, who clung to each other.

"I brought you something," Ritter said. He reached into his pocket and pulled out the baseball he'd retrieved from his car. He put it in Rub's hand.

RAY MORRISON

“It’s the game ball. We won today.”

Immediately, Rub cradled the ball in his palm and began rotating it with his thumbs. It was obvious he couldn’t do it too fast, but he managed to keep it moving. For five minutes, no one spoke. The three adults watched the boy roll the ball in his hands. Ritter walked to the Bloomfields and hugged them together before going back out to the waiting area. He sat down next to Evelyn, who reached up to wipe away the tear that had run down Ritter’s cheek.

Two hours later, Rub slipped back into a coma. Four hours later he died, still holding his baseball.

The muted sound of a distant foghorn distracted Chase Ritter. He finished buttoning his jersey and shut his locker. He stuffed the lineup card into the back pocket of his uniform pants, patted the other pocket to make sure he had everything he needed and walked out to the field.

The saltwater smell of Chesapeake Bay wafted into Lawrence Stadium. Ritter liked Portsmouth well enough, but he knew 1962 was his last season in baseball. He was forty-one and had made it to the Class A level. The majors were never going to be in his future, and he knew it. He and Evelyn had talked for months and decided that Chase Ritter had had his run in baseball. It was time to get a real job.

Ritter stood with one foot on the top step of the Portsmouth-Norfolk Tides’ dugout. It was a warm late-August night and promised to be ideal for a ball game. As he watched his players stretching and warming up, he surveyed the smooth auburn dirt of the infield, and the grass of the outfield, brilliant green in the bright stadium lights. He loved baseball and without a doubt he would miss it.

Ritter closed his eyes and breathed in the mix of smells—the hot dogs, the brick dust, the sea breeze—and then reached into his pocket and pulled out the baseball he brought to each game. With his eyes still closed, Chase Ritter rubbed the baseball in his hands, spinning it faster and faster until he reached the rhythm he wanted. The Bloomfields had insisted he keep the ball, knowing in their hearts that Craig would have wanted Ritter to have it. Now he never came to a game without it. When his team was flagging,

RAY MORRISON

he would take it out and rub it, and most of the time that seemed to help, but not always. Ritter didn't care.

He watched one of his current players stretching on the field, a young pitcher named Bob Milliken, who often said, "Baseball is life." There was a time that Ritter would have agreed. But now he knew better.

He stuffed the ball back into his pocket, and then stepped onto the field and walked toward home.

KEN WALDMAN

TWIN KILLING

It looks so easy, a quick 6-4-3
double-play, two-hopper to short, underhand
feed to the pivoting second-baseman
who fires to first. It looks so easy,
though it's not. To field the ball cleanly
and efficiently is an art. Understand
the teamwork in getting a sliding lead man—
spikes flying—and sidestepping injury
to complete the relay. The umpire's hand
signals out as the first baseman's long stretch
beats the runner's last big stride to the bag.
The 6-4-3 double-play. A casual fan
never will comprehend the beauty. Such
is the game's stark, sudden, graceful zig-zag.

NICK KOCZ

WHAT WE REMEMBER ABOUT THE GREAT LOVES OF OUR LIFE

The forty-nine dollars spent for a dinner of hamburgers and margaritas on the first date, on an evening that we couldn't even work up the nerve to ask for a goodnight peck on the cheek.

The mustard stains we found on our shirt when we got home, alone, that night.

Two tickets for an ABBA reunion concert we bought on the off chance that what we heard her hum in the back seat of a cab was "Dancing Girl."

How we tore the tickets into a fine confetti and flushed them down the toilet when she said no one, but no one, goes to ABBA.

Then she called back and said, "that would be fun, you know?"

"I love ABBA," she confided, giggling. "But I didn't want you to think I was or dork or anything."

The Orioles games at Camden Yards.

Our Love was the only woman who understood the importance of a rally cap. The Orioles were always in last place, always at the wrong end of a blowout. They had no hitting, had no pitching, could not turn a double play with any consistency, and yet our anticipation built to the seventh inning stretch when she would leap atop her seat and, steadying herself by holding onto our shoulders, lead our section of the outfield bleachers through a chorus of "Take Me Out To the Ballgame."

The ache that came over us whenever she was not in our sight.

NICK KOCZ

The mad scramble to assemble a wardrobe from the few items of clothing we kept in her apartment closet. We fashioned ourselves to be upright citizens yet we went to the office with the same olive poplin suit, white shirt and Ferragamo necktie for a week straight. We didn't mind co-workers snickering at us. Even our socks were the same.

The hickory smoke from Boog Powell's Barbecue Pit that colored the outfield skies on still, windless nights. The way barbecue sauce danced on the corner of her lips. The smell of the smoke in her long red hair when we drove home.

Innings vanished when she reached into her past and told us how it was to be the oldest child in a family of seven. There was always a scraped knee to be bandaged, a younger sibling to wake for kindergarten.

We glanced at the scoreboard with no conception of how many runners were on base, our shoulders touching, feeding each other peanuts from shells that we crushed with our fingers. She cleared the hair from her eyes. One day, she said, she was on the rocking chair with her baby sister, who was ten months old at the time. She tapped the little girl's hands and pressed their palms together. She wanted to teach her how to play paddy cake but was making no progress. The infant withdrew her hands and laughed. Her frustration built. No matter how many times she tried, the infant would not co-operate.

"I felt like a failure," she said. "And then she uttered my name. It was the first word she ever spoke."

A beer vendor put down his cooler on the empty seat next to us and poured a Natty Boh pilsner for the man sitting behind us. A tear slid down her cheek. When the ballpark organist launched into the opening chords of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," she remained in her seat.

"Someday, I want to raise children of my own," she said.

A Sunday morning at her apartment. She rolled over in bed, drowsy, her red hair ironed to her forehead. We had the morning's sports section folded open in bed with us to study the baseball statistics. The Orioles as a team

NICK KOCZ

lead the league in but one category: GDP.

“Must you do that every weekend?” she asked.

We were just reading the paper, we said.

“Statistics are a waste of time,” she said.

The healthy glow on her face three months after our wedding. She was radiant and wanted to stay in bed all weekend. A vicious rainstorm, the aftermath of a hurricane that devastated barrier islands on North Carolina’s Outer Banks, pelted the windows.

“I can really go for some tater tots,” she said.

The baseball tickets for a day/night double-header that we couldn’t use because they interfered with the first scheduled sonogram. The prenatal specialist spread a cool, clear gel onto her belly from what looked like a plastic squeeze bottle that had the same contours as the mustard container in our refrigerator. What was said to be a baby appeared as nothing more than mush.

“We’re going to be a family,” she said, squeezing our hand as we stepped into the elevator after the doctor’s appointment. Her eyes teared and, not having a tissue on hand because she forgot her purse in our car, she wiped them with that first sonogram picture. We didn’t want to tell her that we already considered ourselves to be a family: her, us, and the Orioles.

“Maybe we can still make it up to the ballpark in time for the second game,” we said, sticking the keys into our Thunderbird’s ignition.

“How can you say such a thing at a time like this?” She wipes her eyes again, this time on tissues that she retrieves from her purse. “Didn’t you hear me—we’re going to be a family.”

The babies she produces. They pop out of her one after another after another. She can not go a year without giving birth. We keep hoping for a fallow period. No matter of birth control proves effective. She wants a baby for each room of the house. “We can get bunk beds,” she says. “Won’t that be wonderful? They’ll sleep two to a room.”

NICK KOCZ

A neighbor gives us a present: earplugs.

The toys that seem to multiply and sprout around the house. Rocking horses and stuffed teddy bears, sixty Thomas the Tank engine trains, and the Wee-As-You-Crawl dolls that are forever wetting the sports page, blurring the fine print of the baseball statistics in the Sunday papers.

“Statistics are a waste of time,” she said.

The tatter tots and mac-n-cheese that become a fixture on the dinner plate. The children are finicky, prejudiced against all foods that don't contain cheese or potato. She loves her role of mother more than she loves her role as wife, gives into them on every occasion.

The bar that we drop into each night on our way, not for the pitchers of beer but for the ballgame that lights the corner television set. For once, the Orioles have started the season hot and with the Yankees and Red Sox suffering injury problems, there is reason to hope for post-season action.

The night that we came home late, the Orioles having lost in twelve innings on a bases-loaded walk. Despite the late hour, so many lights are on in the house that we can see it from a block away. Inside, babies crawl about everywhere.

She is so exhausted at night.

ZACH MANKOFSKY

DEATH OF A CUBS FAN

There is a cardboard box at my feet crammed with my inheritance. At the bottom are the immigration papers, the first ones from Canada and the last ones from New York. Then the first-edition Zane Greys. Then one of my mother's old jewelry boxes stuffed with my father's little tokens, like his wedding ring, and the yarmulke that Baba sewed in Odessa. And finally the rifle, leaning against one corner of the box, its firing pin long removed. My father's rifle: the walnut stock and black-metal barrel still look like a piece of my childhood bed frame.

All day I dragged the box from room to room in my parents' house. Now it lies at my feet like a loyal dog.

We're sitting in the living room. My mother is beside me on the couch. My cousins, also in their forties now, straddle dining room chairs carried in from the other room. The rabbi sits on a velvet-upholstered ottoman in the middle with his legs crossed at his knees. There is a notebook in his lap. He is gathering information for the eulogy while my cousins take turns one-upping each other with bad jokes.

The rabbi has a face like open arms, practiced in sad smiles. He wears a sweater a size too small. His corduroys recede halfway up his shins but his white socks are pulled up higher. He nods at the jokes, takes notes and finally says, "And you, Mrs. Mayor. I'm sure you have all the good stories."

My mother was born for this. She's the perfect mourner. She matches the rabbi's crossed legs and stacks her hands on her knees as she speaks. She says a lot of sweet things about my father that would have sounded forced when he was alive. Her arranged marriage is adapted to a romantic comedy. Her husband's crude humor is repackaged as wit. Now he was thoughtful, not moody, and stoic rather than stiff.

Half listening, I open the jewelry box again. Under the yarmulke and ring is a baseball card. It is an Ernie Banks rookie card: a floating black-and-white batting stance beside Ernie's boyish smile in color. My father's favorite card: still in mint condition, still in the same clear, protective case.

ZACH MANKOFSKY

All day I've been taking the card out, examining it, and placing it back in the box. At the bottom Ernie signed his name, spelling out "Ernest," and I notice how similar his signature is to my own.

There is no way to know if my father kept this card intentionally. Everything else red-and-blue is gone, exorcized from my parents' home. The living room walls are bare. I knew this already but was surprised when I first arrived. The empty wall space is striking. The rabbi probably thinks they are bare only today, but they have been bare for five years. Even the rifle was taken down with the Cubs memorabilia. Maybe the Ernie Banks rookie card was stashed away in an attic at the time, long forgotten and saved from my father's spring cleaning.

My mother never knows when enough is enough. She strays from her assignment and recites her husband's stories. They are stories my cousins and I can recite by memory, too. We only restrain ourselves from groaning because the rabbi is here and he keeps nodding and smiling sadly. She is telling the one about my father enlisting:

"There was a recruitment fair in Lincoln Park. Avi walked up to the army first. He said he wanted to sign up. They said great, come in, we'll get you checked out, fill out your paperwork. But after the medical they said he had an irregular heartbeat and he couldn't enlist. So Avi walked up to the navy, said he wanted to sign up. They said great, come in, we'll get you checked, and get your paperwork pushed through. But when they checked, they said he had an irregular heartbeat and he couldn't enlist. So Avi walked up to the air force, said he wanted to sign up. They said great, come in, we'll get you checked, but again they said Avi had an irregular heartbeat, so he couldn't enlist.

"Then Avi walked up to the paratroopers. He told them he wanted to sign up. They asked him, has anyone done your physical? And Avi said, yeah, so far three times. So they said great, come in, let's get your paperwork done. And that's how Avi got to fight in the war."

The rabbi laughs his courtesy laugh. The cousins chuckle politely. I am reading the back of the Ernie Banks rookie card for the nth time today so I don't notice when the rabbi turns to me. "And the son," he says, "Do you have something to add about your father?"

ZACH MANKOFSKY

I hesitate. My cousins are looking at me warily.

“Maybe just one thing,” the rabbi adds, “something you would like said tomorrow.”

The room waits for me to respond. I haven’t spoken for so long my voice is louder than I expect. “You guys look nervous,” I say. “Are you worried I’m going to spill one of the little secrets? That I’ll say something about him denouncing the Cubs? Maybe I’ll tell the nice rabbi that Avram Mayor was an atheist?”

My cousins shake their heads and crow their don’t-be-sillies. “Of course he believed,” they tell the rabbi. “Of course he attended weekly.”

The rabbi’s performance doesn’t falter. He nods. He closes his notebook and says, “Of course, whether or not that’s true doesn’t matter this week. It only matters that he was a good husband,” he says looking at my mother, “and a good father,” looking at me.

I have a reply to that, too, but I feel my mother’s hand on my forearm. “I think you’ve said your one thing,” she whispers.

Sixteen years ago I said all I ever needed to say in a long, neatly handwritten letter. It was the morning after my wedding, before the honeymoon. Our luggage was already packed, waiting by the door of my L.A. apartment. I found the Ernie Banks rookie card in my closet and mailed it back to my father. We never spoke again.

But here I am, in Chicago, on the day before my father’s funeral. “One less regret,” my wife had insisted.

When the rabbi leaves, my cousins surround me. They are balding at the same corners of the forehead, each at a different rate. They take turns slapping my shoulder. They say, “I didn’t think you’d come, Ernie.”

I say, “It’s Ernest.”

“Just you?”

“Yeah. I’m only staying until Thursday.”

Then they scold me for telling the rabbi that my dad didn’t believe in God. I tell them they’re hypocrites: we’re a bunch of Jewish atheists. “Every day but the last day,” they joke, and we’re laughing when they leave.

In the evening I drag the cardboard box back into the living room. It’s

ZACH MANKOFSKY

eleven o'clock. My mother is out there, still smelling like a department store, letting the news scream past her. I find the remote and lower the volume. "Heck of a day, Mom."

"Don't tell me you're tired already, California boy."

My mother wears a matching top and bottom made of blankets. White diamonds on plush purple. Her wrists seem ready to snap at the weight of the cuffs.

"I can take it if you can," I say.

I sit down on the couch cushion next to her and place the box at my feet. Some of the items in the box rattle. The rifle falls toward the television so that light gleams where the chrysanthemum seal used to be. Now it is a thousand white scratches in dark metal.

We watch the news and I eat leftover thin crust. A two-minute sports update debates the Cubs' chances in the playoffs and it's impossible not to think about my father. My mother must be feeling the same way because she says, "Wouldn't that be something, if this was the year?" Afterwards she reaches for the remote and turns the television off. She leans forward and points to the barrel of the rifle, her wrinkled forefinger barely an inch from touching it. "You know the story behind that thing?"

I search her face for the confident wisdom I will never not expect of her. My eyes must show worry because she winks at me, amused. "Not funny," I say.

"Let me tell it again."

"I really don't need—"

"I haven't had a chance to tell it today."

My mother never gets the rifle story right. She's heard it too many times, is too bored with the truth. And I know as she's telling it this time that she's emphasizing the trauma intentionally, as if this time it would excuse my father certain choices made afterwards.

My cousins and I have a best guess at the truth, based on a lifetime of recognizing patterns in the different versions told by Avram Mayor. This is my interpretation:

The Philippines. My father and his squad cornered some Japanese. Maybe

ZACH MANKOFSKY

a couple. Maybe a dozen. The Japanese, unable to run, turned kamikaze and charged the ridge where my father waited, into the American fire. My father's rifle jammed. (At this point in the story, my mother inevitably cracks a joke that Avi Mayor never properly cleaned anything.)

One of the Japanese, firing wildly toward the ridge, sent a bullet through my father's chin, into his bicep, before someone else shot the charging soldier down. In seconds my father was covered in blood. Chin wounds, he joked once, the bloodiest of them all. His squad members took one look at him and their eyes gave away their conclusions. "We'll come back for you," they stuttered, leaving him bleeding and alone and trying to stop the bleeding with his hands.

Then my father waited in enemy territory. He clutched his jammed gun and peered over the ridge. Mere feet away lay the man who shot him. The empty eyes stared back at my father. They waited together. Sometimes the wait is ten minutes, sometimes an hour. Once my father claimed it was half the day, assuming he was dying, waiting to die and wondering why it was taking so long.

The story always ends the same way. Finally my father got the courage to crawl forward on his stomach, in his own blood, to retrieve the rifle that shot him. When his unit returned they couldn't believe he was still alive

My mother finishes with an impression of her husband. She mimes holding a rifle with her frail arms and says, "It got me right here," in her lowest possible voice, drawing a line through her chin, into her right bicep. She pulls up her plush purple sleeve and points to a scar that isn't there. "After that, it was my gun for the rest of the war."

Then my mother stands up, kisses me on the forehead and we say our goodnights.

As I'm lying there waiting for sleep, I text my wife, "The rifle is mine now."

"What are you going to do with it?" she responds.

"eBay."

In the back of the funeral home my cousins have a portable television running on D batteries. My mother and I, wearing black ribbons on one

ZACH MANKOFSKY

shoulder, are making our procession to our seats in the front row. We can hear the snowy static as soon as we enter the room. We recognize the familiar cadence of play-by-play.

Leave it to my father to die during a Cubs playoff series, and leave it to my family to be willing to compromise.

The rabbi is leaning against the podium with his chin resting on his hands looking powerless about the situation. Half the room is pointing one ear toward the last row. I'm about to walk back there but there's a long look from my mother toward the back of the room and the static ends.

One of the relatives I don't remember leans forward and says, "Ernie Mayor, how the heck are you, where's the missus?" but my mother gets him with her eyes, too.

A few more people clear their throats. One more aunt exclaims at a nephew's handsome haircut. Then there is a comfortable quiet, comfortable because in this room the last decade never happened. My father never got sick. He never gave up on the Cubs. And it's okay that his nephews watch game two of the NLDS in the back row of his funeral. It's okay because nobody told the rabbi any recent stories. Every memory predated the postmark of my final letter.

"Today we are gathered to celebrate the life of Avram Mayor," begins the rabbi, "loving husband of Sue Mayor, and loving father of Ernest Mayor." When he mentions our names he makes eye contact with us. Behind him is the bare, unstained coffin.

The rabbi continues: "And of course we can't forget his other son, Ryne Sandberg. At least, he wasn't afraid to claim that on game days, was he? How many times do you think he said: 'with a name like Sandberg he had to be Jewish.'" And we all laugh politely.

My father made the announcement at Passover, after Harry Caray's first stroke: "When Harry goes, if they haven't won by then, I'm done."

Nobody believed him. The Cubs were Avram Mayor's life. Every morning it was sports radio. Every afternoon he put on a Cubs hat and walked down to the deli, looking for other people with Cubs hats, fishing for conversation. When Harry Caray joined the broadcast booth it was instant romance. He

ZACH MANKOFSKY

liked the way Harry talked about the old neighborhood and the way he called his partner Steve Stone a “nice-looking Jewish boy.”

My father’s announcement came shortly after we stopped talking, so the news found me secondhand. My cousins called me right after the Seder. They thought my father’s promise was hilarious. I found it typical: a tantrum, because his son wrote him a harsh letter, nothing more.

Then Harry Caray died, February 18, 1998, and Avram Mayor took all his Cubs junk off the walls, put it in a box and left it on Waveland Avenue.

According to my mother, he was very businesslike about the whole thing. He read the news in the morning papers and calmly took it all down—the pennant flags, the panorama of Wrigley, the tacky “Mayor of Rush Street” poster with the “Holy Cow” speech bubbles—found every last item of red-and-blue in the cellar, threw it all in an oversized box, drove it to Wrigleyville, and left it there on the curb.

Turns out we both had a real knack for ending relationships.

My cousins watched it happen. They followed him to see if he’d go through with it. They said the first person to pass by the stuff on Waveland was a woman walking her golden. She stopped to peek inside the box, nodded and kept walking. For a day it became a touching memorial to Harry. Other fans added their red-and-blue junk to the pile. But the next morning it was gone, gobbled up by street vendors, resold back to the north side hopefuls.

Harry dying was the end of the old neighborhoods, my father’s Chicago. The Caray grandson moved into the broadcast booth and the yuppies won the north side of town. My father never looked back. Avram Mayor was reborn into a life without Cubs baseball. According to my mother, when she told him the good guys were going to finish first in the Central this year, he smiled through the tubes and said, “Yeah, right.”

For us it started in 1970. The last time I saw my father he was sitting in his living room with the television off. A lone Cubs pennant hung on the wall beside the rifle. “I need to talk to you, Ernie,” he said, and I could tell immediately it was one of those times the gee-whiz jokester made way for the war veteran. “You’re turning eighteen soon. Your mother and I are giving you the choice. Either you have a job by then or you get yourself enlisted.”

ZACH MANKOFSKY

I told him I'd sooner move to Canada.

Instead I moved to Los Angeles. I lived on friends' couches for a year before I wrote back with an address. In response I got a curt letter wishing me good luck, with an Ernie Banks rookie card enclosed. Ernie Banks the rookie that was older than he could have been, older because he had to delay his career, because of his service to the army during the Korean War.

But after a couple years we started talking again. Occasionally my mother would pass the phone to him: a brief hello here and there. One Christmas I sent him a Cubs Spring Training shirt from Catalina Island which, according to my mother, he wore all the time. He walked down to the deli and boasted about his son the telecubbie out in L.A.

The last time I spoke to my father was in September of 1984. He called out of the blue. He wanted to talk about the Cubs playoff chances. I couldn't care less about baseball, probably because my father couldn't care more, but I sat there and talked about Sandberg's hot bat and ended up late to work. "Every time we play the Braves I think about you. You're like Skip in the other booth," he said, "Different but still blood." And for the first time I considered visiting Chicago.

Then the wedding. Keiko and I didn't think twice about it. The day before, only my mother showed up, pretending nothing was wrong, trying to act extra joyous for the occasion. "Is Dad okay?" I asked. "What happened?" And when my mother hesitated to say anything in front of my Japanese-American fiancé I knew what it was.

You never suspect your father is racist if he never talks about it, especially a father that named you after the first black Cub.

The rabbi is almost finished. He's gone back to levity. "Avi Mayor had a saying. You're born naked, you die in a suit. You can't lose." The audience, well aware of my father's favorite joke, laughs anyway. Then the rabbi improvises, "Unless you're the Cubs," and everyone shuts up. Finally it feels like a real funeral: solemn, a consideration of wasted life.

Awkwardly the rabbi tries to pass it off. "Does anyone else want to say anything?"

I raise my hand in jest, and my mother pulls it back down. There are a

ZACH MANKOFSKY

few nervous chuckles in the audience. “Let’s play two,” I call out, quoting Ernie Banks, because I’m not so different from my family when it comes to grief. There are a few more chuckles and a guffaw from the back I recognize as one of my cousins.

When the service ends there is an uncomfortable shuffle out of the rows of chairs. The rabbi walks over to us in the front row and shakes our hands with both of his. He holds eye contact too long to stress his sincerity.

Meanwhile my cousins, who are also the pall bearers, turn the volume back up on the portable TV. People begin to crowd at the back of the room again. The lilt of the play-by-play suggests something exciting is happening in the game. Someone cheers, “Come on, baby, for Avi.” And the rabbi walks back there, no match for Cubs baseball.

“I’m going to go box their ears,” my mother says. “Keep your dad company.”

I watch her march down the aisle. Then I turn to the front, to the emptiest part of the room, where the casket waits alone. I step onto the elevated stage and stand before it. I put my hand on the casket and try to imagine my father inside, but it has been too long since I have seen him. It is easier to imagine the casket empty. It looks too fresh off the assembly line. I graze the unfinished wood with my fingertips. The surface is newly sanded. In the last two days I’ve heard maybe a hundred stories about Avram Mayor. I’ve added none of my own. But now I am reminded of one more story, a story that I want to tell:

I was young, under ten, sitting beside my father on the couch. We were watching the Cubs. This was before my mother let her husband hang sports memorabilia on her walls, back when paintings of flowers covered the living room. My father sat with the rifle on his lap. He was sanding the stock, trying to get rid of a knick that had been there since the war. There was a double-play during the game and my father pumped his fist from the couch and yelled “Bingo to Bango to Bilko” at the screen victoriously. The phrase was a favorite of mine in childhood.

After a couple innings the sanded surface of the gun became an airborne powder. My father did not know the Japanese used poison sumac for lacquer. The dust settled on us and we both broke out into rashes on our

ZACH MANKOFSKY

arms. Avram Mayor panicked and called for his wife and for the rest of the game, we sat there on the couch while my mother applied lotion to our irritated skin, shaking her head and smiling. My father said nothing for the rest of the game, visibly embarrassed, and I felt more comfortable with him than ever before.

I open the casket without making a sound. The inside is bare except for the body. At the center of the casket is Avram Mayor, a small figure in a big pinstriped suit. He looks like he is standing up even though he is horizontal. He has a mustache, a thin mustache like an old movie star, groomed more thoughtfully today than any day of his life. He doesn't look asleep. He looks aware even with his eyes closed. But he has nothing left to say. My father is done striking up conversations with strangers in Cubs hats. He is done telling stories.

I hear the rabbi approach. "Mr. Mayor, excuse me," he says. "Let's close that, shall we?" His voice cracks as he rushes up to the stage.

I keep looking at my father.

The rabbi walks up beside me and puts one hand on the casket's lid. I feel him pushing against my grip. "We really should close this now," he says, and this time his voice carries a hint of pious steel.

"Take it easy, rabbi. I told you we're atheists."

With my other hand I reach into my suit jacket and retrieve the Ernie Banks rookie card. Then I lean into the casket and slip the card into Avram Mayor's breast pocket. I feel like a father slipping cash to his son when the mother isn't looking. I jiggle the card into his pocket until it is out of sight. He looks no different than before, but now he seems whole again.

LIZ DOLAN

THE HOUSE THAT RUTH BUILT

In front of a hole in the right field wall
my father spreads the tarpaulin to protect
the grounds from a sudden downpour.

His once slender waist now bulges like
the Babe's, too many center-cut pork chops
and home-grown spuds. On his forearm, a tattoo,

Hands Across the Sea, two hands shaking
over the red, white and blue, the green, white
and gold, a tryst between Ireland and America.

With a North-Irish brogue, he'd tell us
*they lament the loss of the old country
where they hadn't a flute to jig to,*

*this is the greatest country in the world
and don't you forget it.*

As if forgetting how he'd gotten these afternoons

LIZ DOLAN

at the stadium: the truck owner, a well-connected Yank,
one hand washing the other, I guess, who bestowed
that job upon him after its wheels crushed

his five-year-old son's head, a job he kept
through the Golden Age of Baseball
'til the New York, New Haven and Hartford,

a pensioned position, beckoned. In lieu of his son's blues
he saw Lou Gehrig's weep, his cracking voice
bouncing off the bleachers and DiMaggio's velvets

squint in the two o'clock sun, his hand sheltering them
as though he were saluting. At home,
thirty blocks south, we baked scones to the tattoo of the kettle

and the drone of Mel Allen's loamy *Going, going, gone.*

GARRET J. BROWN

GALILEO IN THE UECKER SEATS *REFLECTIONS ON FAILED OBSERVATIONS*

Eye pressed to the viewfinder, lashes crushed against the lens, the tiny bulb erupts into a blazing blue smear, a nebula with a white-hot filament that burns the retina, leaves an afterglow that is visible after every blink: against the wall, against the stereo speakers, against the stuffed Santa propped in the corner. It is Christmas morning, 1985, and I am eleven. Among the treasures spread under the tree is the slender red tube of a telescope, a refracting scope—a spyglass, essentially, like the kind Galileo used to observe the moons of Jupiter. Looking through the eyepiece, I am unable to discern anything, the magnification reducing anything indoors to a shapeless blob. So I snap off the telescope’s viewfinder and begin a series of microscopic observations: the pores on the back of my hand, a strand of my sister’s hair, the micro-fibers of the new couch, a single Christmas tree light pulsing among the spiked needles of the Douglas-fir.

History has made much of Galileo Galilei’s astronomical observations of late 1609 and early 1610. But what I find most remarkable is not that he spied three, then four, moons around the planet Jupiter; not that his observations bolstered the heliocentric view of the universe, espoused by Copernicus; not even that his findings would threaten the Church’s authority over the heavens and eventually sentence Galileo to a life under house arrest. What I find most remarkable is the secondary, and seldom discussed, conclusion at which Galileo arrived.

With Halley’s Comet due to appear in the winter of 1986, I wasn’t the only child to find a telescope under the tree that Christmas morning. On the telescope’s box, the aesthetics of which betrayed a 1970s design, Tasco, the manufacturer, had added a sticker boasting, “Comet watchers choose Tasco.” And inside, slipped between the clear plastic film of the box top and the Styrofoam packaging, was a thin booklet outlining the science and history of Halley’s Comet. In the weeks after Christmas, I took the booklet

GARRET J. BROWN

to bed each night and drifted through its glossy pages. I read about the comet's early apparitions, how it could be spotted in a medieval tapestry, stitched above a depiction of the Norman Invasion. I read about how it escorted Mark Twain into the world in 1835 and how he predicted he would leave the world with it in 1910. And I learned that a comet is a dirty snowball, gathering particles of ice and dirt, methane and ammonia, accumulating mass as it rolls through the deep expanses of the solar system. These elements are eventually lost, sublimed into a spectacular smear of light as the comet nears the sun, its coma blown by radiation into its distinctive tail. Similarly, Halley gathered mass in the outer regions of my imagination, waiting to be made visible, set on fire by a blast of solar wind.

The telescope also came with a poster-sized map of the Moon, each crater and mountain range, each smooth mare labeled with a strange, Latin name. So at the first full moon, I grabbed my new scope and headed out to explore those gray, rocky landscapes in the sky. But I quickly discovered that seeing isn't only about the eyes—it's about the body, the ability to position it in space, it's about the craftsmanship of the instruments at hand and the skill of the person using them. The tripod that came with my scope was only about a foot long, so pointing the lens at the stars meant the eyepiece was on the ground. This limited me to the small sky of the backyard where, on a picnic table, I could stack a tower of phone books and delicately balance the scope's tripod on top. Still, I was young and didn't have the patience for astronomical observation. I wasn't steady-handed enough, once the Moon was in the viewfinder, to gently tap the telescope into the correct position. I set out seeking the Sea of Tranquility, and found myself beached on Frustration each time the tripod slipped and the scope tumbled off its improvised mount.

It took a series of observations for Galileo to recognize the tiny stars around Jupiter as moons. After all, it was just a couple months before that he recognized, with the use of his new invention, that our own moon wasn't a flat disk, divinely endowed with its own luminescence, but had canyons and mountain peaks that reflected light from the sun, cast shadows over the ground. But the fact that these new stars were in a straight line, that

GARRET J. BROWN

they appeared in different places each night, and that occasionally one of them vanished, presumably behind or in front of Jupiter, led Galileo to the inevitable conclusion: here were four smaller bodies in orbit around a larger one—moons! But why would God set moons so distant from the earth, so distant that nobody could perceive them without the unnatural technology of a spyglass? Galileo's answer was simple: there must be people living on Jupiter.

Seeing isn't only about the eyes. Instead of being discovered by an astronomer peering through a telescope into the wild reaches of space, the planet Neptune was conjured out of abstraction by mathematicians. Urbain Le Verrier in France and John Couch Adams in England, independently of each other, were trying to solve the discrepancy between the orbit of Uranus predicted by Newtonian mechanics and the orbit that astronomers were actually observing. Le Verrier and Adams, more or less simultaneously, predicted that another planet's gravity was tugging Uranus off course. Using nothing more than paper, pen and a knowledge of Newton's physics, they were able to determine not only that this planet existed, but what its mass must be, and where it would be located in the sky. Le Verrier, who didn't have access to a telescope powerful enough to look for the planet himself, wrote to Johann Galle at the Berlin Observatory with his prediction. Galle received the letter on September 23, 1846 and that same night pointed his scope towards Capricorn and Aquarius. And there was Neptune, a blue dot merely 1° off its predicted location.

In the winter of 1986, I knew that Halley's Comet was out there—a white doe stalking through a forest of stars; however, for an eleven-year-old, growing up under the glare of Baltimore's lights, gaining access to a dark sky at four in the morning was a feat that required negotiation with a number of adults. My uncle lived on a river and, while not completely free of light pollution, his sky was darker than our own. And so on a Friday night, my mother drove me and my sister out to his house, and in the pre-dawn hours of a Saturday morning, under a sky of winter crispness, our small expedition made its way out to my uncle's pier on Bird River. We were bundled in

GARRET J. BROWN

thick coats and hats, armed with hot chocolate and a clipping from the *Baltimore Sun* that showed the horizon dotted with little comet symbols, each marked with a specific date, time, and location for our latitude. By now, I had ditched the clumsy telescope for my father's binoculars that we always brought to the ballpark, a weighty pair that came in a felt-lined case, each eyepiece and lens protected by a black plastic cap. But while I had learned, from the long yellow bleachers of Memorial Stadium, to pick off Eddie Murray kicking dirt out of his spikes at first base, I had never learned how to identify a constellation, or to distinguish a planet or comet from other astronomical phenomenon. Still, I was baffled that—when the sky was dark, and the date was right, and the time was right, and the direction that we were facing was right, when every variable seemed to be accounted for—my prey failed to appear.

Picture Galileo's extraterrestrials the way he might have imagined them. This was, after all, the Age of Discovery, and surely strange, distorted tales from the Americas and Africa held gravity in Galileo's mind. Did he imagine Jupiter's globe scattered with tribal nations, clothed in animal skins and initiating their young hunters with elaborate rituals, each one beginning at the rise of a different moon? Or could he have pictured Jovian cities of pyramids and stone towers, merchants hawking exotic baubles over the din of the bazaar, the names and values of the coins changing hands inspired by the four lunar objects overhead? Or perhaps all of Jupiter was inhabited by only two people, an Adam stretched naked in the long grass, and an Eve lying awake and watching him sleep, feeling lonely and wondering why the moons in the sky outnumbered them.

When Halley's Comet appeared in 1066, it was considered an omen. But the nature of that omen depended on if you were Harold II or William the Conqueror.

“Whether you can observe a thing or not depends on the theory which you use. It is the theory which decides what can be observed,” said Albert Einstein. Unfortunately for our Bird River expedition, my theory on comet

GARRET J. BROWN

hunting came from a Miller Lite commercial that aired during the Chicago Bears drubbing of the New England Patriots in Super Bowl XX. In the ad, Bob Uecker has been camped out on a hillside for three weeks, waiting for Halley's Comet. He is joined by Tommy Heinsohn, and after the obligatory debate over whether Miller Lite tastes great or is less filling (and Uecker, who's been waiting his whole life for this comet, doesn't want to be bloated for its arrival), Heinsohn asks for a beer. Uecker bends down to fetch one from his cooler, and we see Heinsohn's face awash in light as the comet flares overhead.

"Incredible!" Heinsohn exclaims.

"What was?" asks Uecker, popping back onto the screen with a beer.¹

My parents' neighbor, Bernie, was a kind man who tended to his sick wife for a time before finally losing her in 1997. I remember his round face, how he always had a smile and a joke, and the way he softly lumbered from his car up the sidewalk. He's a minor character in my life, having lived across the street from my parents for just a few years, but his wife's death is fixed in my memory. From my parents' front yard, the comet Hale Bopp, bright enough to be seen in the pale blue of early evening, rose over Bernie's house every night for weeks after his wife's passing.

The apparition of Hale Bopp was as unexpected as it was spectacular. Discovered less than two years before becoming one of the brightest comets on record, there were no expectations. It was like driving across Iowa and stumbling upon the Grand Canyon. And it taught me, finally, how a comet actually moves through the sky. Like other objects, it rises at a certain time, sets at a certain time, and—being the shaggy, eternal drifter

¹ Uecker's most famous Miller Lite commercial depicted his persona being cast out into the upper deck of a baseball stadium, the "nosebleeds" or what are now called "Uecker seats" at Milwaukee's Miller Park. Sometimes, I compose the tragedy of Galileo's conflict with the church in terms of that commercial. Galileo, played by Uecker, is at the baseball game with his Venetian friends. He's lecturing them about how the baseball isn't a perfect sphere, but has seams and stitches when observed through a telescope when a bishop from Rome, playing the part of the ballpark usher, tells Galileo, "You're in the wrong seat, buddy. C'mon." Galileo, assuming the Pope has finally accepted the Copernican view that the game revolves around pitching and not hitting, thinks he's getting a papal promotion. "Ah, I must be in the *front row*," he brags to the Venetians. But the scene cuts to Galileo, banished to house arrest in the obstructed view seats high in the upper deck. He turns his rally cap around, clinging to hope that the Pope will change his mind. Forbidden to use his spyglass, Galileo finds discreet ways to continue his science, dropping one peanut and one piece of cracker jack off the back of the stands, testing to see which hits the ground first.

GARRET J. BROWN

that it is—appears at a slightly different position each night until the motion of the Earth swings it out of view.

When sketching Jupiter's moons, Galileo would track the planet's motion by noting its position in relation to a nearby star. Presumably, this detail supported his claim that the tiny moons were part of the Jovian system, since they moved with the planet against the backdrop of stars. In a series of later sketches, made in 1612, there was one particular speck of light near Jupiter of which Galileo made note. He marked the object with an asterisk and labeled it *fixa*: the label a gesture to the idea that stars were fixed into the outermost sphere of the firmament. What he didn't know, what he couldn't have known unless he tracked that speck of light long enough to note its retrograde motion, was that the object was not a star at all. Galileo drew the planet Neptune in his notebook 234 years before Le Verrier made his calculations and Galle plucked it out of the sky.²

That night on my uncle's pier, Halley's comet, as depicted in the Miller Lite commercial—tail of flames crackling, illuminating our faces for one sublime moment, and then vanishing before we could look up from our hot chocolate—never appeared. I now suspect, however, if the light pollution didn't make the observation impossible, that we did lay eyes on the comet. But because it didn't shimmer or move, because it was just a dull smudge of white camouflaged among other stars, we didn't recognize it for what it was. Like Galileo looking at Neptune, I didn't have the knowledge to appreciate what my senses were experiencing.

I failed to see Halley's comet, Einstein would have told me, because my theory was wrong.

In 1910, Halley's Comet passed so close that, for six hours on May 19th, the Earth was directly in its tail. Panic ensued. Fears that cyanide from the comet's coma would make the Earth's atmosphere toxic were stoked by

² A recent study of Galileo's notebooks by David Jamieson suggests that Galileo actually did note the retrograde motion of Neptune during his observations of Jupiter's moons. If Galileo's knowledge of this could be demonstrated more definitively, he would be credited with the discovery of the planet.

GARRET J. BROWN

opportunistic merchants who peddled “anti-comet pills” and gas masks. There was concern the tail could affect the Earth’s magnetic poles and disrupt telegraph lines. The affluent held rooftop parties, determined to either get the best view or, if the world was indeed ending, at least be impeccably dressed and intoxicated for the occasion. If, in 1986, the conditions for viewing the comet were the worst in over 2,000 years, viewers of the previous apparition could literally touch it.

Picture with me being eleven years old in 1910. On the night the Earth passes through the comet’s tail, we each sneak out of our respective homes and meet by the tree stump we use for home plate on spring days. Joey Warner has brought comet pills and he passes around the bottle. We all take one, partially out of fear that the adults may be right and the comet may be dangerous, but mostly because, well, they’re *comet* pills. And we walk out into the dark field at the end of our street, our silhouettes against a sky that flutters white, like a sustained trill of silent lightning. And the wind through the dogwood trees is tinged with a hint of ammonia and almond. And I spread my arms, take a deep breath and swear to you that I can taste the comet in my mouth, feel its frost branching inside my lungs.

NIKKI THOMPSON

DODGER BLUES

For Liz M.

I. Jackie Robinson

As a child, she didn't think of herself as a girl but as someone who could grow up to play in the Big Leagues. She came from a long line of almost professional baseball players. Naturally she dreamt of sliding into home on national television, of catching carelessly thrown balls at first—stretching those impossible last inches, cleat still on the base, crowd roaring. To overcome her gender's poor confidence, which she mistook for lack of talent, she practiced discipline and repetition with her dad, who played in the minors when there still was a C League. Her ambitions were two generations after her grandpa was drafted by the Milwaukee Brewers, then the U.S. Army. By the end of junior high, she realized she would carry on the family legacy and that gender was predetermined.

II. Pedro Guerrero

She was too thoughtful and too thin and a girl, so she mostly sat on the bench in high school. The boys feared anyone who was smarter than them, and the girls envied anyone who was super-model skinny. At the end-of-season banquet, her softball coach announced her as holding the highest GPA on the team and mentioned a concern for withstanding the playing field's strong winds. He thought he was being funny. Previously, raging at being pulled from the game and mistaking herself for a soccer goalie, she had drop kicked her glove and considered his head. This happened just after she had debated her point over the phone as to why she should get more playing time. For Exhibit A she batted a thousand for two straight games. For Exhibit B she pitched a game of almost perfect innings. Despite dirty softball uniforms and posters of Trent Reznor and Soundgarden hanging in her room, she remained a bookworm and a pariah. Every closing argument she ever made failed against the deafness of preconceptions.

NIKKI THOMPSON

III. Steve Garvey

Years later, she ran into her high school softball coach at the bookstore, and he asked if she had a boyfriend. He was still gray-haired and paunch-bellied and still objectified her wrongly—back then, at pitcher, not first base, even with her long legs and flexibility. Now she would rather have talked softball and why she had to take the blame for the team's errors, since college was teaching her the theory behind boyfriends. She enjoyed being talked about in relation to herself and not as a player on a two-person team. Unable to consistently strike out the side, she had to rely on a team that was indifferent to stopping ground balls, and, as a result trust remained an unknown. With the coach playing the center fielder at shortstop, the catcher at first, and other mismatches, it wasn't really their fault, just as her parent's misery toward each other was learned from her grandparents. Throws to first hurled past even the right field backup, and practice makes perfect, which would have been a good solution, but the obvious is often elusive and self-sufficiency becomes convenient.

IV. Kirk Gibson

The dust of the softball field, the smell of leather gloves, and the salt of cracking sunflower seeds once meant imagining away the outcast at school and the desperate peacemaker at home. Later, the corseted rules of co-ed slow-pitch made the absence of base stealing and the rareness of line drives to the infield more apparent. Now the leather of her cleats was stiff and the soles had forgotten the shape of her feet. Carefully thought-out batting orders were impossible in between the alternating space of man, woman, man. When the bases were awkwardly loaded, women remained the weaker sex, and the intentional walk became an accusation. The rule makers assumed women were less capable at the plate and wrote in the provision for the automatic walk. Remembering her days of real softball, she always took her at bat. The sunflower seeds, which still littered the floor of every dugout, had taken on the bitter of citrus.

NIKKI THOMPSON

V. Dusty Baker

Unlike the rules for being a girl, the rules for softball were clear and written out in a manual somewhere. As a result she was frightened by groups of all women and intimidated by their femininity. Calling off players for fly balls was second nature, but defending herself against the made-up faces of the girls at school was impossible. Because she could back up careless throws and missed grounders, she couldn't understand why girls who she thought were her friends would turn toward their lockers and giggle to a nearby classmate when she said hi in the hallway. These same girls would be as nice as they had to be when they needed help with chemistry homework. She felt more comfortable hanging out with the boys, especially if they were talking sports or cars, but not girls or sex. She took pride in her ponytail disheveled by a batting helmet and understood the way men left the house in old jeans and T-shirts with holes. She learned that other women check the mirror before leaving the house and that softball isn't life.

COLIN RAFFERTY

BOX SCORE (#41)

He is left-handed, perfect for first base, the edge of his foot on the bag while he stretches out his lanky frame for the ball that comes to him from the infield. When his Yale teammates throw, it is perfect, Ivy League quality, a searing bit of whiteness that does not lazily arc through the sky but rather buzzes, high-pitched, an angry insect that the flytrap of his glove will close upon. It is perfect for him to use his body this way, this clean movement of muscle. When he was a pilot in the war, he bailed out of a burning airplane, his parachute jerking his body as he fell to Earth. This is better, to use his body this way.

It is 1990. The war gets farther away every day. He played in the first two College World Series, although Yale lost both times. Part of his job now is to throw out a first pitch every year, to open the season officially; Taft started this, with his corpulence so different from George's own body. George is a sportsman; the body doesn't forget. But he was a first baseman, not a pitcher; he is used to collecting the ball, not throwing it, the double play ends with him, Tinker to Evans to Bush.

He throws out a first pitch in Canada this year, at the new stadium. He meets with their Prime Minister, for talks (their official reason), but he is there for the baseball, for the chance to be on the field again.

He wears a Texas Rangers jacket, the team his son owns. He grins broadly when stepping onto the field, lighter and happier than his Canadian counterpart. He points to his catcher, calling the pitch, snaps it off while the Prime Minister is setting himself. The form is still there, the drawing back, the following through, the ball leaving his hand as simply and cleanly as the SkyDome's retractable roof (which is not retracted).

How little time remains for George to do this. Just twice more before he is called out, retired by the rookie from Arkansas. It's a pitcher/first baseman play, to try to pick off the runner on first. *Caught him napping*, the announcers say.

COLIN RAFFERTY

But that day in Toronto, under the roof, all that is far ahead of him. George is pure joy at this moment, an old man at the top of his game, a young man remembering his game. As they interview him in a suite later, the crowd will roar at the action on the field. He'll hear it, crook his thumb over his shoulder towards the noise; *I like all that*, he'll say, the grin again.

RON WALLACE

DEATH OF A LEFT FIELDER

He was Chickasaw.

He was eleven
 long-limbed
 brown skinned,
long shining black hair flying
beneath his Braves cap.
He was spring unfolding into summer.
He was the wind
 covering the earth,
as he ran toward the left field foul line,
glove extended for the catch.

He dove for the ball
 landed hard
 but rose and made the throw.

Suddenly he was fifty-seven
 long-limbed
 brown skinned.
Still, he dove for the ball
and the empty bottle of white port wine
shattered when he hit the black top back street.

He sat up in jeans he'd worn for weeks,
and looked at his tee shirt,
the unstrung bow of the Choctaw Nation
 covered in dirt and blood.

He was Chickasaw.

RON WALLACE

The voices rose from the bleacher seat.
Throw the ball, Travis
 hit the cut-off man
 hit the cut-off man,
but he couldn't find the ball through a bleeding eye.

For just a moment he sobered.
He tried to blink the world back into focus,
but his eyes liked it better
when they were drunk
 so they were.
And he looked again for the lost ball.

The game on the line,
he began to crawl off the hot paved road
through two inches of rainwater,
puddled in a drainage ditch
 deeper into tall, cool, green grass.
He rose and threw the bottle neck
at the cut-off man
before he fell back into the soft grass
where they would find him in a day or two.

He was Chickasaw.

MICHAEL BEGNAL

AT THE GRAVE OF JOSH GIBSON

Allegheny Cemetery, Pittsburgh

On a slope of a hill, up a steep hill
buried slant, a flat stone,
grass at the edge, grasshoppers scatter
pollen grains on pantleg,

two fawns among the grounds,
black dragonflies in the air,
I am wearing my Grays hat,
we have come to pay homage

and to smoke a bone,
and to say that he's there,
or staggering out of a movie theater,
or in a joint in Homestead,

all speech is in its own meter
and can be scanned,
the meter is probably irregular,
the body breaks down

in a fight at the Crawford Grill:
two anapests and an iamb,
Crawfords get ill,
a bloodied face or a dirty mitt,

MICHAEL BEGNAL

or wailing in your wail corner
like some kind of assertion:
a mask artist, staggering out,
a mask artist, staggering out!

Hill footpaths trod to the Grill, and
you know he's there with you now,
wailing in your wail corner
and on the corner

when veins get varicose,
he's there in the narrative theater,
in the park, on the diamond, at the plate,
he's there in a Grays uniform

holding a giant bat and two suitcases:
he's there,
in your skull,
bashing things

PATRICIA CANRIGHT SMITH

seamer away, fine. But you *do* realize—

No no no no no. *Confidence*. Let it go, blow it out, *allow your shoulders to grow warm and soft*—Head Doc is such a fruitball—and now feel-up that little cowhide behind your back, sweet, small, smooth like Jamie's little titties—not supposed to think about that, either, whoof whoof—focus.

Find your seams...come set...into the wind-up...and a *rocket to the plate, strike one, yeah!*

Ball two.

Ball two? Mister Har-vold, Umpire, *sir*—are you shitting me? That pitch did not even catch *any* of the black? Who throws meatballs down the chute, man, come *on*, get yourself some eyewear. Blind old Porkster with a two-inch strike zone to go with his two-inch pecker.

And Morales did not frame that pitch at all, not even close. Stupid bastard.

Wait. Do not approach, do not come out here, goddamn it Morales, do not say...

You okay, kid? And he hands you the ball.

Stone face, like you're workin' it in your mind.

Morales says, *not the curve*.

Right. Your own damn catcher don't trust your best damn pitch either.

Morales says, *Bust him in. That conyo don't take his bat off the shoulder—bust that pincher*. He grins a wicked grin, pats butt—homo—and trots back to the plate.

Wo...two ball count and you *bust* him? Morales is some serious meat. You look at Skip but he's granite. He spits.

Okay.

Okay, okay, *now: mow 'em down, mo-fo.*

Ball three.

Well, yeah, but *worth* it, deep-fried twinkie diving to the dirt like he was ducking monkey shit. Maybe it's time to swing the *wood*, Al-bert. What kind of name is *Albert*, anyhow?

Okay.

Ready.

What? What's that, Morales-my-man? I can't...it's the lights, this old park is one sad sack, but I can't *see*, sweat in my eyes—what'd Granny used

PATRICIA CANRIGHT SMITH

to say, sweatin' like a whore in church?—dust or something in my face, zzzzzzzzz in both ears now, I can't see what you're putting down. Shouldn't of wasted that last pitch, goddamn it, now I'm gonna walk frickin' Gonzo and set the table for frickin' Cedenó—*Confidence*. Dawg-boy, yakker-man, you are the world's baddest—wait, *you're moving your lips*.

It looks bad, bro, talking to yourself on the mound. Just grab the rosin, dab the hand...

Okay.

Ready.

Now Dirt-bag Gonzales holds up his hand and steps out to fuss with his gloves and now the Porkster's *sweeping*, busier'n a cat covering crap on a marble floor.

Take your time, gentlemen.

Morales throws the sign.

What?

High heat? Oh shit oh lord. High heat *down the middle*? Oh man, but it's the *Lord Charles* they can't hit, that 12-6 curve drops right out of *sight*, it is a thing of beauty, I been foolin' batters with that pitch since I was frickin' *ten-years-old*. No. Gonzales catches up with a heater he will send it to *Mars*, three-run dinger, all she wrote, game over, series done, we go home.

Morales shows again, no mistake, high heat, middle, and he pounds his fist in his glove.

Shit, shit-crap, *okay*. Gotta settle now, can't *lose* this, not like last time, little prayer, chin up, little man, rosin up, grip up—*sheeeeeeee*, I get it. Albert's *taking*. Course he is; Morales knows Albert don't swing on a three-oh count. Well okay, why didn't you just say so, my man, no problemo, just gotta keep it simple, just rifle one over the plate, simple, simple simple, simple, and we *roll*.

Ball four.

Oh, *goddamn* it, *Mr. Snappy*, *goddamn* it, got away from me, I'm lucky Morales blocked it and now we got ducks on a pond, no place to put another one and Cedenó's stepping up and oh, shit, now we got Mazzone coming at me, Captain Hook himself hiking up his saggy-ass britches. Okay now, get yourself straight, little buddy, take off your hat, it's all good, pitcher-man,

PATRICIA CANRIGHT SMITH

Yakker-dawg, wipe your brow and do not look at the scoreboard, it's okay, baby, just even out the dirt, kick a little rubber...while Hook takes his sweet time from the dugout, two up in the pen, and what is that zzzzzzzzz? and crap in the eye, goddamn it, some bug or something, shit's everywhere, here he is, goddamn it, Mazzone, do *not* ask...

Whatchya got, kid?

Harvold's squeezing me pretty good, coach.

Gotta play the hand you're dealt, kid.

Little shrug. Toe the mound. Please please, for god's sake, puh-leeeeeze do *not* say...

Just throw strikes. Kid? You'll be okay. Throw strikes.

I knew it. Like they think pitchers come out of the bullpen with a plan, no, with a god damn sacred *mission* to throw nothing but balls. Christ.

Throw strikes, he says again—Oh, okay, didn't *hear* you the first two times, Coach, good thing you *repeated* yourself, right on, Captain Brilliant, sure will *throw strikes*, why didn't anyone tell me that was the plan?

And he pats butt—homo—and starts back to the dugout.

...but the thing is, can I even throw a damn strike? Because when the arm's this strong I got no control. That's the truth. Oh mommy, but I do not want to lose this battle with myself.

Oh lordy, sweat, lights, buzzing and Cedenó, leering at me, the bastard—but what the hell is *this*? The cloud-thing again, Jesus, it's *moving in*, is it a duster? Now what's the Pork doing? Waving his arms and Cedenó's bent over slapping himself on the helmet and damn, now I can't hardly see the plate, can't hardly see nothin' through this dust or whatever the hell—*aaaghh*, it's *bugs*, in my mouth, up my nose, in my ears, and the little fuckers bite, too. Garcia's headed in through the bug cloud slappin' and jerkin' like a kid with cooties, Sorel's running, Gonzales is off...wait. Harvold's *waving in the field*.

We're suspending play?

Hoodoo, Mama, wishes really do come true.



PATRICIA CANRIGHT SMITH

All quiet in the dugout. Skip's standing at the rail staring at the field like he's hypnotized, Mazzone too, giant cloud swarming out there, thing reminds me of one of those magnet dealies with steel specks for hair except this one's millions and millions of specks, all shimmery, so big it'd have to be Dolly Parton's hair. Black shit on my towel, Morales's wiping out his helmet, leg jumping the way he does and I ain't sayin' nothin' and no one talks to me, neither, not when I'm pitching—but am I still pitching? Are we going back out?

You all ever seen anything like this? Junior says in that gentle voice to no one in particular. Of course it's Junior breaks the silence.

Naw. Nope. Dios mio. Umm-mm. Malo. Crazy. Yo.

Gnats, Bones says. I love Mr. Bones. Bench coach, one of the best, been around baseball all his life.

Them's gnats, he says again.

More mumbling: *Gnats? Ay que la verga. No shit. Zat right?*

Bunch of horny bastards, too, Bones says, and he snorts a fat lugie. He spits. Someone laughs and Bones says, *All them's males—it's a mating swarm.*

Moto conjero? Crazy, all over that. Wo, horn-dawgs...A mating swarm?

I can't hardly believe that shit.

Bones says, Called a ghost. He snorts again, spits, grins like some crazy bastard and looks me right in the eye. He says, *I'd call it the Holy Ghost, son, wouldn't you?*

I kinda nod.

But—does he mean we're done? Game called, we win? Or what.

Guys all stare out, not sayin'. They know. I'm the frickin' rookie.

Way I see it, you got yourself a little breather, Bones says, watching the ghost.

Oh shit.

So let me give you a piece of advice.

Shit.

Cedeno? That hacker'll swing at anything in his area code, boy, sucker can not lay off. So when you go back out there, just go ahead and throw—

Shit

PATRICIA CANRIGHT SMITH

—that nasty, nasty curveball. Go ahead and give it to him three times.

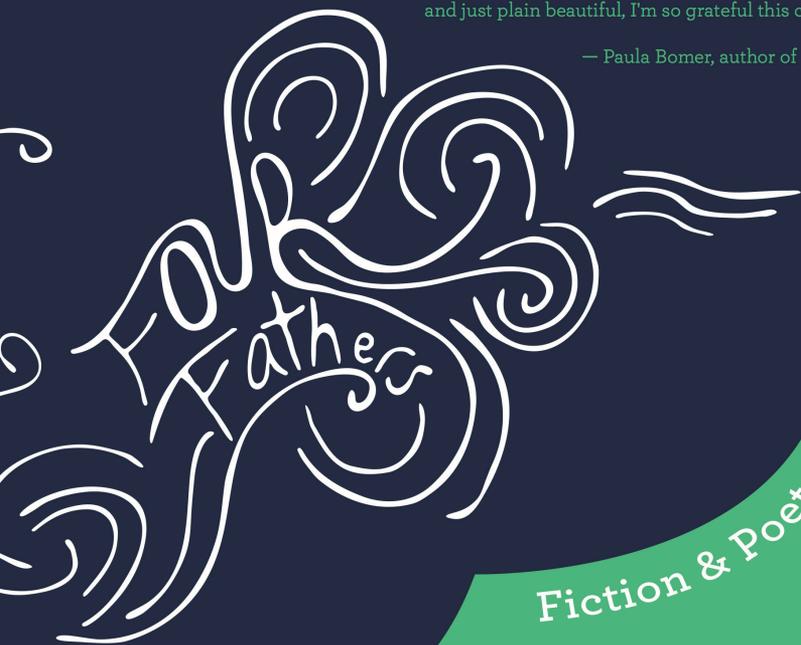
Serious?

Serious?

Okay. Damn straight. Throw the yakker, mow 'em down. That's what I do.
And that is what I did.

"At times gut-busting hilarious, devastating to the point of tears,
and just plain beautiful, I'm so grateful this collection is in the world."

— Paula Bomer, author of **INSIDE MADELEINE**



Fiction & Poetry

Foreword by Greg Olear

author of **FATHERMUCKER**

Dave Housley
BL Pawelek
Ben Tanzer
Tom Williams

Available Now!

\$11.00 + free shipping

at CobaltPress.org

JOSHUA ISARD

WRITE LIKE ROY PITCHES

I have a man-crush on Roy Halladay. That he's retired has done nothing to abate this since he could have kept playing, could have found a team that would give him a chance to go back on the mound despite the fact that his arm clearly can't handle pitching in the majors anymore—but he retired. With class.

This crush only has a little to do with the stats he racked up, or the way he made Major League hitters look like flailing children—no, my crush mostly has to do with the way Halladay walked off the mound after each inning.

In 2010, I was privileged to see him pitch during one of the greatest individual seasons in baseball history. He won 21 games and finished with a 2.41 ERA. He threw a perfect game in May. In October, he threw only the second playoff no-hitter in baseball history, a game I attended, which I'm sure is one of the greatest single sporting events I'll ever witness.

For those of you who aren't baseball fans: that's dominant.

Those stats make me a fan. The business-like way he went about pitching makes me enamored.

He would strike out a hitter with a fastball that looked like it went right through the bat and then just stick out his glove and ask for the ball back. Next up...

TV stations shot him sitting on the bench between innings leaning forward, focused on the field. I want to believe he was not only thinking about the three hitters due up next, but feeling the whole rhythm of the game, paying attention to momentum and whether his team had more or less of it when he climbed the hill to warm up again.

And, most importantly, when he finished an inning, he put his head down and walked to the dugout. While his teammates jogged in and chatted, he had a measured pace like any of us walking to get the bus in the morning, and rarely even reacted to the fans cheering him. No celebration if he'd struck out the side, no frustration or complaining to the umpire if he'd

JOSHUA ISARD

given up a few runs. Go back to the bench and do it again in a few minutes.

Many writers have discussed their daily habits, and how routine they are. Philip Roth got up every day, went to his office at nine in the morning, and worked pretty much an eight-hour shift. Zadie Smith explicitly says not to romanticize the vocation, and sticks to a daily pattern of re-reading and re-writing her work while she composes a book, something she says can be an “intolerable” process at times.

Few successful writers talk about the muse, or the individual days when things go remarkably well and the words pour out. They stick to their routines, they work hard.

Like Halladay. Like any good pitcher.

No-hitters and perfect games might get the most time on Sports Center, and 3,000-word days certainly get the most action on Twitter and blogs, but in both professions that’s not where success lies. Pitchers have to put together whole seasons, and writers have to put together whole books. Both involve more grinding than glamor.

If a pitcher’s season is like a writer composing a book, then the stat that’s most analogous is innings pitched. Not wins, strikeouts, or earned run average.

A good season for a pitcher is 200 innings. It means that the pitcher started every fifth game as scheduled, and performed well enough to stay in through the game’s later stages, giving his team a chance to win.

In 2010, Roy Halladay pitched 250 innings. When I think of that I look at the figurine of him my wife bought me for my birthday and which I keep on my desk. My heart flutters a little.

When writers put together books they log their innings. Some innings will be great, some disasters, but the goal is for most to be good. And the way to keep them good is to write when it’s your turn. When you sit at the desk you have to get the words on the page. When a pitcher is on the mound he has to get guys out.

Some days a pitcher doesn’t have his best stuff, and no one knows why, but on those days it’s still his job to win, so he grinds out innings. I’d argue that those days really define him. Does he let the game slip away, or does he dig deep and find a way to get through each inning? Those who do the

JOSHUA ISARD

latter have careers in the big leagues, everyone else rides the bus.

It's the same thing with writers. The established ones compose even on days when it seems impossible. When they have a cold. When the kids are acting up. When there just seems to be nothing to write about.

Halladay thought of pitching as his job. I'm sure he felt privileged that it was, but it was still a job. And of course I wouldn't have this man-crush if he didn't get results, but it's the way he recorded his innings season after season that makes me admire him more than others.

There's a motto I apply to myself, and also take into my classroom every time a student talks about the muse or tries to workshop an old story because they couldn't think of a new one: write like Roy pitches.

NATALIE CORBETT SAMPSON

STONE DUST AND LUCKY CLOVERS

I like my car seat because I can see out the winnow. One time Daddy forgot my seat and I got to sit in the big seat but I couldn't see out the winnow so now I like my car seat better. Because I like to see out the winnow 'specially when we go somewhere new. Like now. I remember not to push the button on my buckle until the car turns off. It's hard to remember that when we go somewhere new. We're in a diff'rent parking lot and I see lotsa cars all around. Oops. My thumb pushed the button on mistake and my seatbelt falls off. I sit very still so Momma doesn't notice until the car stops and she turns it off. She says "Com'on" but I'm already coming up to the door and pulling it open. I can open it all by myself now. 'Cept when Momma isn't on the outside it gets stuck.

The door moves open and I'm ready. I remember my hat and my glove. It's a special blue glove for catching balls, not for winter. I have a ball too. It's sparkly and has rainbows on it where the sunny spot is. I even have special shoes too. They have spikey things on the bottom that make me run fast. Daddy said so. Maybe they're turbo jets like the boots in my video game.

Momma wants my hand in the parking lot. She's worried if she'll get lost. But I'm holding my ball and my glove and I don't have a hand for her. She holds the bendy part near my hand instead. I don't remember what it's called. We walk through the cars to a big hill. It's a good rolling-down-hill but Momma still has my bendy part so I can't lie down to roll. At the bottom of the hill are lotsa people. Big growed ups and kids like me. I see Dylan waving at me. He's in my school but he doesn't sit at my table. Oh, Maggie is here too. She's bossy. There's lotsa other kids but I don't know 'em.

Momma is talking to a growed up. He says hi to me but I don't wanna talk to him. I hold up my ball but he doesn't see the rainbows on it. He tells me to go with him, and Momma lets go of my bendy part and says to go too. He must be a good stranger then. There's a big fence like for the bear at the zoo, but it's not finished. Some parts of it are short like for the rabbits.

NATALIE CORBETT SAMPSON

The growed up tells me to stand with Dylan and gives me a ball. His ball doesn't have rainbows on it so I want to use mine. He says okay. I have to throw it to Dylan but I don't want to, it's my ball. He says Dylan will throw it back but I don't think so. Dylan took my green crayon and didn't give that back. I want Momma to hold my ball so Dylan can't get it. The growed up says okay and so I run super fast back to Momma and put the ball in her lap. My shoes must have turned on when I didn't see them. I wonder if the turbo jets are shooting fire like on the game so I turn around to look and then run into the growed up beside Dylan. It's a good thing I wasn't running my fastest or he might have falled down. He digs his toe in the rocks and makes a letter. Cool! I know it's an X because my teacher said so. Maybe it's a Y. They are tricky. He says for me to stand there and points at Dylan and says he has the ball. I don't know why he gets to have it first.

Dylan throws the ball at me. I put up my glove and almost caught it. Dylan can't really throw as good as Daddy. When Daddy throws it I don't even hafta move my glove and I catch it every time. I turbo run over to where the ball stopped and try to pick it up with my new glove. My glove doesn't really work, the ball keeps staying on the ground. The growed up says to use my bear hand but I don't have claws. I use my other hand instead. Another ball rolls past me so I get that one too. Now I have two balls. That's more than Dylan. I put them in my glove. It's so big I can carry two balls in there. I bet I could put 100 in there too. I turbo run back to the letter the growed up drew and take one ball out of my glove. I throw it at Dylan but he can't catch too good. He misses it so it goes past him.

Another growed up stands beside me and asks for my ball. Maggie is there too and says I taked her ball. I didn't take it, I finded it. It's mine. But the growed up still wants it so I give it back and he gives it to Maggie. No fair. My X or Y is messy now so I fix it. I reach down and point my finger into the rocks. They are cold even though it's hot outside. I move my finger and the rocks move outta the way leaving a big hole, kinda like finger-painting we did at school, 'cept different. I can write my name, I remember the letters from school. The ball rolls over my S and smushes it a little bit. I'm almost done when the growed up comes back and makes me stand up. He doesn't even see that I even got the E to go the right way. He wants me

NATALIE CORBETT SAMPSON

to look at Dylan. He has the ball again. I put my glove up and Dylan misses again. He's not a good thrower like me.

Another growed up comes back and takes our ball. He doesn't even ask. He draws a line and tells us to stand on it. I dunno why he gets to draw and I can't print my name. I stand next to Dylan and show him my glove. It's bigger than his. And blue. His is just pooppy brown. The growed up calls my name and says to me 'get ready'. He hits a ball with a bat and it rolls but Dylan's in the way so I can't reach the ball. It just rolls past. The growed up says my name again and hits another ball. It rolls to me and I put my glove down to stop it and I almost stop it but it rolls under my glove and through my legs. The growed up tells me to put my fingers down like a monkey and then bends down and says 'like this' but it looks more like he is a girl like my sister and he has to pee outside but maybe not that far down. He doesn't say 'ooo ooo eee eee ah ah' like a monkey does. It's Dylan's turn but the growed up hits it to me and Dylan can't get it. I can't get it, it's not my turn. I don't think the growed up is very good at hitting balls. He says 'get your glove dirty' to Dylan. That makes me remember the rocks. I put my glove on the ground and drop some rocks in it. When the rocks fall there's smoke that comes out. It's like a fire. I pretend my glove is on fire, dumping more and more rocks in watching the smoke come up. Maybe it's smoke from the turbo jets on my shoes. My glove sure is dirty.

I look up and Dylan is running to the bench. So are some other kids so I go too. Dylan has a water bottle. I don't have one. Now I'm thirsty and I don't have any water. A growed up says to sit on the bench. It's really high but I can get up on it because I'm big. Maggie needs a growed up to lift her up on the bench. I swing my legs. My special fast shoes are heavy and it makes my feet swing fast too, faster than Dylan's. Then a growed up gives me a helmet. It's bigger than my bike helmet. When I put it on I wiggle my head and the hat wiggles too. Dylan laughs. I wiggle harder and the helmet comes down in front of my eyes. A growed up says it's my turn but I can't see. I push the helmet back up and wait, then he calls me again and gives me a bat.

I dunno where to go but the growed up shows me to stand beside the black stick. On the stick is a ball. It doesn't have rainbows. He tells me to

NATALIE CORBETT SAMPSON

put my foot there and there then he squishes my hands together. He says 'keep your eye on the ball' but I think that would hurt if I hit it. I swing the bat really hard like Daddy showed me and the ball goes far, almost to the grown up standing in front. Everyone yells *Run!* and I'm scared for a second but then I run. When I jump on the white square it squeaks. I jump again. And again and again and again until Dylan hits the ball and everyone yells *Run!* again. A grown up on the field calls my name and tells me to run there. I run to another square in the middle of the rocks.

The square is dirty and there's lotsa rocks on it. I bend down and start sweeping the rocks off so it's clean and tidy. Everyone is yelling *Run!* again and Dylan goes past me so I run too. I'm afore him so he shouldn't go past me, that's butting. My turbo jet shoes make me run faster than him so I get to the square first. Good. The grown up makes him go back. When everybody shouts *Run!* again I get to go back to the beginning but that means I have to sit on the bench again. Dylan goes to the bench too so we decide to make castles out of the rocks. Mine is bigger and he gets mad and steps on it.

Then we're s'posed to get our gloves. I can't find mine, someone must have taked it. The others run out on the rocks and I still can't find my glove. Maybe it's gone. Maybe someone stealed it 'cause it's blue. A grown up says 'what's wrong' and I tell him I can't find my glove. My eyes get a little wet so I rub 'em with my hand but now there's rocks in my eyes and it really hurts and so I cry. Momma gets there and I tell her there's rocks in my eyes and she tells me to blink and it gets a bit better and then the other grown up finds my blue glove and then I can go out on the rocks and wait for the ball.

A little kid gets to hit the ball next. She swings and the ball falls off the stick and rolls on the rocks. Lotsa kids run at the ball and fight over it. I didn't know we didn't hafta take turns. I'm gonna get the next one. When the ball rolls off the stick again I run turbo jet fast and fall on my knees to get the ball. I'm fastest and get the ball first. Maggie wants me to throw the ball to her but I'm not gonna, I got it first. Then a grown up takes it away. Oh well, it didn't have rainbows like mine either. Dylan gets the ball the next time and he has to throw it too. After that I don't want to run any more. I go back to where the grass starts and try to find a clover 'cause

NATALIE CORBETT SAMPSON

there won't be any clovers in the rocks. Lotsa times the growed ups are yelling *Run!* again but I think they're yelling at other kids. No one comes to tell me to run on the grass and my legs are tired of standing up anyway. Maggie comes over and asks me 'bush or tree' with the funny grass but she just cheats so when I say 'bush' she makes it a tree. I tell her I'm looking for clovers and she wants to help so I say 'okay'. I put my blue glove on the grass and we put the ones that look sorta like covers in my glove so I can ask Momma what is a lucky one.

Maggie and me have a whole bunch of clovers when the growed ups yell for us to go back to the bench. I pick up my glove too fast and the clovers all fall out. Maggie gets bossy again and tells me 'just leave it' so I do and we run back. She must have turbo jet shoes too 'cause she's almost as fast as me. The growed up says we have to do a cheer and he counts to three. I can do that—one, two, three! Then he yells something but I don't know that word. He says 'line up and shake hands' so I get in line behind Dylan. I stand really close so no one butts. I remember how to shake hands 'cause my Daddy showed me how but the others don't shake hands they just give me a high five so it's too hard to shake their hands like Daddy showed me.

Momma is there and says 'let's go'. She holds my glove and my rainbow ball so I can hold her hand. I like it when she squeezes my fingers just a little. She says we can get some ice cream before we go home and go to bed. I hope they have Moon Mist 'cause that's my favourite. I wonder when I'm gonna play baseball 'cause Momma said I was going to do that after supper and supper was a long time ago and after ice cream is bed. Maybe she forgot.

SANDRA MARCHETTI

FIELD IN WINTER

Snow lights on the mound
and settles downy as wings.

Slicked in spit turned ice,
the concave diamond
spreads against night:

a shallow bowl filled quick
to white—the stadium

a ringed breath flared
then folded tight.

ALETHEA GERDING

THE GHOSTS OF COOPERSTOWN

My vacation plans had been cancelled, but I pretended to be put out when my brother called to say, “You could do me a favor.” He continued: “If you’re going to be in that general vicinity, Sis, how about a week in Cooperstown?”

I may not be the statistics-obsessed, trivia-addled fan Dave is, but I am a baseball fan. Dave can tell you who hit the most doubles in the 1940s. I prefer the romance. I imagine train rides all the way out to St. Louis; Mick and the boys palling around New York with Sinatra; Willie Mays playing stickball with the kids in Harlem. Even baseball’s darkest moment has a romantic sheen, although of the literary sort—the man who fixed the 1919 World Series bankrolled Jay Gatsby.

Dave thinks he can find a scoring error in the 1925 Series. In that seven-gamer, Roger Peckinpaugh racked up eight errors, a dubious record that still stands. Never heard of Peckinpaugh? Didn’t realize that was a record? Join the club. Like I said, trivia is Dave’s thing. Sometime recently, someone somewhere found an extra at-bat or hit or plate appearance—something that changed Ty Cobb’s batting average. Dave is on the hunt for a similar find. He thinks a scoring mistake credited Peckinpaugh with one error too many, and he’s been scouring online newspaper repositories in an attempt to prove it.

So he begged me to spend a week at the Hall of Fame Library, looking for conflicting accounts about one of the games. I pretended spending a week in the library wading through dusty scorecards, crumbling news clippings, and spinning microfiche files would be a chore, but, truthfully, I could handle the mornings mired in statistics if I could spend the afternoons soaking in mythology and romance.

My first morning in the museum’s library stretched until three in afternoon. The newspaper clippings, with their advertisements for Houdini appearances and J.C. Penney grand openings, enchanting at first, soon began to remind me of the tabletop at an 80’s-era Wendy’s franchise.

My head was swimming, I was craving a square hamburger, and, with no

ALETHEA GERDING

information to clear Peckinpugh of an error, I left the library to wander about the museum.

Embarrassing personal trivia: My first celebrity crush was Lou Gehrig. While the rest of the girls swooned over John Stamos, I taped a picture of tousle-haired Lou in his Columbia football uniform to the inside of my locker. He was everything a teen girl could hope for: handsome, athletic, safe, loyal, and tragically afflicted. The gallery floor was empty, except for a man standing in front of Gehrig's locker. His broad back to me, he had his suit jacket clutched in his left hand, propped on his hip. I approached the exhibit silently and glanced at the black-and-white, foam-board-backed picture of Gehrig mounted to the side of the locker. In the picture, his hat was pushed back on a forehead wrinkled in amusement, and he sported a dimpled, almost mischievous smile. No wonder the fourteen-year-old me swooned. The thirty-four-year-old version did too.

To say my Gehrig obsession continued through high school and college and into adulthood would be an outright lie. My ex-husband proves that. He was a life-of-the-party, wandering-eyed, hard-drinking, jolly Babe Ruth type, not a strait-laced, understated, humble, steady Lou. Apparently, whatever lessons I received from ballplayers of the Roaring Twenties were inappropriately learned.

Staring into Gehrig's locker, I sighed, remembering the excitement of dating and wooing a Babe Ruth and the disappointment and humiliation of being married to one. "Just a locker, when Babe's got a whole room, the big galoot," the man said. I turned to him in surprise. The Babe Ruth Room was my next planned stop. The man smiled, his eyes crinkling and his forehead rippling. "Not that I'm keeping score," he added.

I smiled back. "It's okay. I was just thinking my ex-husband was a lot like the Babe."

"How'd that work out for you?" he asked. He smiled a broader smile, with dimples making divots in each cheek.

"He is my ex," I answered, distracted. This guy looked familiar. Maybe he'd been in the library with me, but the only guys I remembered were two guys doing research for a book about baseball curses and ghosts. They were rumped and jolly and reminded me of Car Talk's Click and Clack. This

ALETHEA GERDING

man, though, was younger and handsome, even if his tie was too wide, and its knot was too small. His pants were pleated and high-waisted. He looked like he'd raided his grandfather's closet.

He raised his eyebrows and remarked, "You're certainly Babe's type."

I laughed. "I didn't realize he had a type."

"True, that fella'd chase anything in a skirt, but he did have a special thing for redheads. Plus," his eyes raked over my body, and I felt the frumpiness of a morning in the library, "a gal with your nice figure..." he trailed off, then cleared his throat. "I apologize. That was inappropriate." He looked away suddenly. He stared back at Gehrig's locker behind glass.

It was at once a come-on and a dismissal, and I wasn't sure at first whether to flirt back or walk away. Introducing myself seemed to be reasonable middle ground. "I'm Kate," I said, holding out a hand.

He shifted a black felt fedora from his right hand to his left, and I noticed a slight tremble in his left hand. At the time, it seemed insignificant. I was too busy marveling at his hat, his whole old-fashioned getup. I pegged him as a hipster.

He took my hand, and although his hands were huge, his shake was surprisingly weak. "I apologize for being cheeky with you," he offered. Instead of introducing himself, he asked, "What are you in town for?"

I explained my chore, Peckinpough, the '25 Series, the errors, my morning in the library.

He shook his head in dismay. "Shame. He was a damn fine ballplayer, and all anybody remembers him for are those errors."

I squinted at him. "What are you *talking* about? No one remembers him for anything."

He chuffed, "But he won the MVP in Twenty-Five!"

Ah, I thought, *he's handsome, but he's a stats geek*. "I should introduce you to my brother," I said.

Looking confused, he took a breath as if to ask another question, but a large group of school kids barreled into the room. He glanced at them nervously. He took a half step back. He seemed uncomfortable with the noise and exuberance. Then he slipped away, raising his hand in a half wave. I waved back, and looked again at Gehrig's picture on the wall. "Whoah," I

ALETHEA GERDING

breathed. He was a dead ringer for the man with damp black curls quickly escaping under the exit sign.

I ground through another morning at the library, poring over faded scorecards and musty programs. I had lunch with Click and Clack, the ghost researchers. They told wild tales of Roberto Clemente sightings in and around Pittsburgh's new stadium and of mysterious objects appearing at Marilyn Monroe's crypt years after Joe DiMaggio's death.

I left them chortling over a Satchel Paige story and returned to my hotel. I called my brother and dutifully reported my lack of progress. He suggested I try season-ending compendiums and sportswriter wrap-ups. I told him I was going for a run. I set off through town, heading south, ending at the high school track. Someone was already there. His pace mirrored my own, running the opposing straightaways and curves, neither of us gaining on the other. Eventually he stopped. I ran through the curve, down the straightaway, and stopped too, when I realized it was the Lou Gehrig look-alike.

He was sweating heavily, soaking a heavy gray cotton sweatshirt with a collar ripped to provide a roomier neck hole. His hipster affectations obviously extended to his workout attire. No microfibers for him. Rather than sweat-wicking, his clothes actually seemed designed to accumulate sweat, and his running shoes were astonishingly thick-soled.

We were both breathing heavily, and I bent at the waist to catch my breath. He spoke first, with no preamble. "I wish I could help you with that Peckinpugh thing, but '25 was one Series we didn't go to."

"We?"

"The Yankees."

Guys using first person plural when speaking of their sports teams is one of my pet peeves. My ex did this with the Tar Heels: "Can't make it on Sunday, sweetheart, we've got a game." By we he meant the Heels, and he didn't mean he'd be setting picks or shooting threes, but that he'd be parked in front of the TV with a beer.

While I rolled my eyes, the Lou look-alike bent to pick up a white towel. He snatched at it several times before successfully seizing it.

ALETHEA GERDING

Maybe it was wishful thinking, or my lunch with the ghost researchers, or I figured he couldn't be so much of a hipster that he'd run miles in flat-soled canvas sneakers, but a crazy idea floated into my mind.

"Oh my God," I whispered. "Do you have...I mean..." Asking a stranger if he has a debilitating and fatal disease based on a few stray observations and a ridiculous idea that he's the ghost of a long-dead ballplayer was something I'd never done before.

"I know what you're thinking," he said.

"You do?"

"You're wondering what to wear to dinner with me tonight."

"Not exactly," I admitted. He had the towel around his neck and was pulling at the ends. His forearms were heavily muscled. So what if he was a hipster, or a baseball nerd, or even a ghost? He was a handsome man who happened to be my first celebrity crush's doppelganger. "I already know what I'm going to wear."

That was a lie. That evening as I sorted through my clothes, I realized I didn't bring much in the way of date attire, and even if I had, what would I wear on a date with a ghost? I'd decided that's what he was. I didn't want to go on a date with a good-looking hipster. I wanted to go on a date with Lou Gehrig, dammit.

Remembering his obvious appreciation for my figure on our first meeting, I tried a low-cut top. Then I decided that would be the sort of thing to catch Babe Ruth's eye (as it had caught my ex's) and discarded it. I chose something less revealing but more sophisticated.

Full of nervous anticipation, I'd reached the restaurant twenty minutes early. I sipped a vodka tonic while folding the tiny red cocktail straw into concentrically smaller squares. When "Lou" entered, my heart fell. He was wearing blue jeans and an untucked, neatly pressed, blue-checked Oxford shirt, with the sleeves rolled nearly to the elbows. He slid a pair of Oakley sunglasses from his eyes to the top of his head. He looked extremely handsome, but thoroughly modern and no different than any other guy on the dating scene. I realized that, as much as I'd hoped for Lou's ghost, even a hipster was preferable to this.

I said, "I don't even know your name," as we sat at our table.

ALETHEA GERDING

“I’m Henry.”

Henry lived in New York City. He worked for the parole board. Like Lou, he was a Columbia man, but he wasn’t Lou Gehrig. I tried to hide my disappointment (and disgust at myself, because what sort of *idiot* thinks she’s going on a date with Lou Gehrig?), but didn’t succeed.

“You okay?” Henry asked. He was perceptive—handsome and nice and perceptive—and I was disappointed.

What was I supposed to say?

I was hoping you were the ghost of one of the best baseball players of all time, and I thought this based on your outdated fashion sense, and the idea that you might have a wasting, debilitating, fatal disease. By the way, I’m not a lunatic. I feel like that’s important to say.

Then again, the date was turning into any other date I’d been on since my divorce: nice enough, but ultimately unremarkable. And so...

“I’d sort of talked myself into believing you were the ghost of Lou Gehrig.”

Henry stared for a second, then threw back his head and guffawed. Somehow, though, I got the sense he was laughing with me, not at me. When he caught his breath, he said, “Sort of like Shoeless Joe emerging from the cornfield?”

“You’ve seen that movie?” I’d forgotten for a second that he wasn’t Lou.

“*Field of Dreams*? Of course I have.”

The dinner was more fun from there. I explained about my teenaged crush on Lou. We laughed, flirted a little. He let me complain about my ex. We joked some about Babe Ruth, and how people in the 1920s bought the story he’d eaten too many hotdogs when, in reality, he’d been laid low by syphilis.

“Can’t believe the things that son of a gun got away with,” Henry marveled.

He walked me back to my hotel, but stopped at the elevator bank. “Here’s where I say goodnight,” he said. I was relieved he wasn’t angling for a one-night stand, but also had to stop myself from inviting him up to my room.

He reached for my hand, and I expected him to pull me into a kiss. He gave my hand a gentle squeeze. Again I noticed how weak his grip was, but closed my eyes and cleared my head. He didn’t have a muscle-wasting disease. He just had a weak handshake.

ALETHEA GERDING

“Can I call you?” Henry asked. I nodded, and he reached into the back pocket of his jeans. I expected him to pull out his phone, but instead it was a small notebook and a pen. I told him my number, and he dutifully copied it down. It was the only anachronistic thing he’d done all night.

I hoped he’d call that night or the next morning, but he didn’t. By the next evening, I’d begun second-guessing myself. Did I talk too much about my ex? Did he realize how ridiculous my Ghost-of-Lou-Gehrig fantasy was?

I spent the remaining mornings in the library, but made daily afternoon visits to Gehrig’s locker. I took morning and evening runs to the high school track. I idly wandered Main Street. No Henry anywhere. No call.

On my last morning at the library, I sorted through a stack of clippings from Roger Peckinpaugh’s hometown newspaper. Looking through his obituary was my last gasp effort to clear him. No luck.

What a week. Peckinpaugh still held the record for World Series errors. I didn’t have a date with Lou Gehrig’s ghost, and my outlandish and unreal theory had sabotaged the very real date I did have with Henry.

I turned the papers back over to the librarian, gathered my notebooks full of nothing, and sidled up to Click and Clack. “I’m outta here guys. Hope you have better luck than I did.” They wished me good luck, and the older of the two stood to give me a hug. I was halfway out of the library when I turned back around to them.

“And here’s a good story for you,” I offered, then told all about my dinner with Henry.

“You know Gehrig’s first name was Henry, don’t you?” Click said.

“And he worked for the parole board after he left the Yankees,” said Clack.

“Wait, you guys don’t really think...” I shook my head.

Click laughed. “At least it wasn’t Ted Williams.”

Clack added: “No joke! That guy wasn’t great with women. Plus, well, you know...”

“Headless,” Click supplied.

“Headless,” Clack agreed.

Before returning to my hotel, I made one last trip up to Lou’s locker, where, on a whim, I left a small handwritten note: *The Babe would have called.*

ALETHEA GERDING

The next morning, a manila envelope arrived at my hotel from the Hall of Fame Library. Expecting some words of wisdom from Click and Clack, I opened the small, folded, lined sheet. I read the spidery, jagged cursive: *No way Babe would've said good night at the elevators.*

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Michael S. Begnal's most recent collections are *Future Blues* (Salmon Poetry, 2012) and *Ancestor Worship* (Salmon Poetry, 2007). He has an MFA from North Carolina State University and teaches at Duquesne University.

Garret J. Brown's poetry and nonfiction have been featured in *Black Warrior Review*, *Poetry East*, *TriQuarterly*, and *the Ledge*. His first book, *Manna Sifting*, won the Liam Rector Prize from Briery Creek Press.

Liz Dolan's *A Secret of Long Life*, nominated for the Robert McGovern Prize, will soon be published by Cave Moon Press. Her first poetry collection, *They Abide*, was published by March Street.

Alethea Gerding graduated from the US Naval Academy in 1995. She is the Managing Editor of the *Journal of Prosthodontics* and lives in Chapel Hill, NC. She denies a girlhood crush on Christy Mathewson.

Jennifer A. Howard directs the MFA program and edits *Passages North* at Northern Michigan University. The drive from her house to Comerica Park takes eight hours.

Joshua Isard is a novelist, short story writer, and professor living in the Philadelphia area. He takes an pride in being dedicated to the Phillies, the losingest franchise in American sports history.

April Johnston's work has appeared in *Newport Review*, *Monkey Puzzle*, *Oklahoma Review* and the *Journal of Microliterature*, among others. She has an MFA from Carlow University and teaches journalism at WVU.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Nick Kocz's stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Five Chapters*, and *The Pinch*. Though he now lives in Blacksburg, VA, his heart remains close to Camden Yards.

Marjorie Maddox, the great grandniece of baseball legend Branch Rickey, has published 12 books, including *Local News from Someplace Else*, *Perpendicular As I*, and *Rules of the Game: Baseball Poems*.

M.C. Mah is a critic and novelist with work in *The Nervous Breakdown*, *KGB Lit Mag*, *Full Stop*, and *The Rumpus*. He lives in Brooklyn.

Zach Mankofsky was born and raised in Los Angeles. He received his MFA in Fiction from CSU Long Beach. In high school, in the only game his splitter ever worked, Zach threw a two-hitter over eight innings.

Sandra Marchetti is the author of a full-length poetry collection, *Confluence* (Gold Wake Press); *A Detail in the Landscape*, an illustrated letterpress (Eating Dog Press); and *The Canopy*, a chapbook (MWC Press).

Ray Morrison is a lifelong Baltimore Orioles fan. His debut collection of short stories, *In a World of Small Truths* (Press 53), was released in November, 2012.

Colin Rafferty, a southpaw, lives in Richmond, Virginia, home of the Giants-affiliated Flying Squirrels. "Box Score (#41)" is one of a series of forty-four essays about the presidents.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

David Salner worked for 25 years as iron ore miner, general laborer. His writing appears in *River Styx*, *Ireland Literary Review*, *Salmagundi*. His second book is *Working Here* (Rooster Hill Press).

Natalie Corbett Sampson lives in Halifax with her four kids and husband. She squeezes writing in between hockey games and music practices. Her debut novel, *Game Plan*, was published by Fierce Ink Press (2013).

Longtime fan of the Mariners (a testament to perseverance), **Patricia Canright Smith's** credits include Short Story America (third prize), and the Mason's Road 2014 Literary Prize, among others.

Nikki Thompson is a poet and book artist (a.k.a., Deconstructed Artichoke Press). She earned her MFA in creative writing from California College of the Arts and is widely published.

Ken Waldman has six full-length poetry volumes, a memoir, a children's book, and nine CDs that combine original poetry with Appalachian-style string-band music. He tours nationally.

Ron Wallace is an Oklahoma Native of Choctaw, Cherokee and Osage ancestry and teaches at Southeastern OK State. He is the author of six volumes of poetry and a three-time finalist in the Oklahoma Book Awards.

PUBLICATION NOTES

“Galileo in the Uecker Seats” by Garret J. Brown was previously published in *Black Warrior Review*.

“The Lesser Coverts of Game Birds” by Jennifer A. Howard was previously published in *Booth*.

“Opening Day” by David Salner was previously published in *Poet Lore*.

“Holy Ghost” by Patricia Canright Smith was previously published in *Stymie: A Journal of Sport and Literature*.

Works in this issue were selected from submissions for the 2014 Earl Weaver Baseball Writing Prize. “Galileo in the Uecker Seats” and “The Lesser Coverts of Game Birds” were solicited by the editor.