

## *Chapter Seven-* *Little League*

Organized ball was not so nearly hit and miss. When I tried out for the first time, I took the streetcar to 19th Street, where we played on grass and dirt. It was a thrill for an 8 year old to take the streetcar by himself!

And I caught a fly ball, albeit with my forehead rather than the glove. I reminded myself not to do that again. On the bright side, not many guys could show off a knot that big on their head. We all had knots, but mine was the biggest. It was my "red badge of courage".

The great thing about little league wasn't the game itself. We were allowed to ride our bikes to the games - far out of our usual limits, and we took full advantage of the situation. Strict instructions to come straight home after the game were routinely ignored. We would have great fun after the game.

For one thing, we would buy a "black cow" (sort of a chocolate sucker) and share it. If we could scrape up a nickel between us, we'd splurge on a Pepsi and share that. We found a bar that gave us a break.

And, oh, would we roam! We would ride home through the hillside streets behind the field. Or ride up to 21st Street and speed down the ramps coming off the Highland Street Bridge, which offered a steep ride with the added feature of dodging the speeding cars and the thrill of making it through 4 to 6 lanes of moving traffic without getting killed.

Often we packed big water guns or water balloons. There was nothing more fun than buzzing some girls and dousing them. If they screamed loud enough, we'd circle the block and make a second run.

At the end of a wild ride through town, we would pray there were no tattle-tales and hope we could explain arriving home when it was dark. That was easy, as my little clan had become proficient in making up tales and we always showed up after dark. It was important that our families never find out that it was only a seven inning game.

So, despite the fact that we were kept on a short leash, there were times when that leash was loosened. We made the most of those occasions and ran with glee. My Mother would have been appalled - buying Pepsi in a bar, riding up the bridge, and

riding through town doing what we were doing. As Henry Winkler says in "Waterboy", "What Mama doesn't know won't hurt her."

By the way, I played for the "Firemen". a traditional powerhouse. At that age, my contribution was catching one fly on one night. But who cared?

There's a lot of talk about parents being supportive of the athletic endeavors of their kids. Never once did anyone mention that "they wished their parents had come." There were few screaming dads around. No snivelling moms. We were allowed to play without parental scrutiny. More importantly, they would have gotten in the way. As I got older, there were times I wished they could see me play. But this was our chance to play, fight, win or lose, and screw around. What a great time we had!

