

~ The Comeback ~

Stepping over the spiked feet of teammates, I trundled down the dirt path between the new, aluminum, first base bench and the protective, chain-link fence, separating the bench from baseball diamond. I was searching for an empty spot to plant my carcass. Sunset was yet another hour away, so the field lights weren't on yet. It looked to be another long night on the bench for yours truly. My ballclub Hillcrest was the home team in tonight's American Legion baseball against league-leading College Park (CP). As usual, our starting nine was leaving me behind as they took the field, wearing our silver-grey uniforms, trimmed in Kelly green, and with green caps with the scripted silver *H* on the front. It was embarrassing actually. Not the uniforms. No, the uniforms looked sharp. But here I was about to turn nineteen in a couple of months and nearly the oldest player on our club and I couldn't break back into the starting line-up? Ya gotta be kiddin' me!

See, I had fouled up big time in our opener, also against College Park, over at the University of Maryland's Shipley Field. That was half a season ago! We had played the entire Legion circuit once since then. Cripes! The manager had benched me for poor play in the opener and relegated me to the doghouse. Not to worry, there was plenty of space available on our first base bench. I planted myself down, pretty much in the middle of the thing. Might as well be comfortable. I folded my arms over my chest, crossed my legs at the ankles, lifted my feet up off the ground, and stuck my spikes into the chain-link fence in front of me. Ticked off, I spit over the fence rail and leaned back against the bench to expectorate and spectate once *again*. While I had no one to blame but myself for my predicament, I felt I had paid my penance many fold since our opener and I should have been pardoned back into the starting line-up by now. I had helped carry the equipment, keep score and chase foul balls. Shoot, this was the first game of the second half of the season and I was still collecting splinters in my butt, even if they were imaginary aluminum ones. In a few short weeks, the season would be finished and my brief American Legion baseball career along with it.

As the game began and the starters tossed the ball around the horn, the guys beside me on the bench clapped half-heartedly, chirping up with the usual bit of scattered, compulsory, encouraging banter. In the dozen or so risers behind the bench, Hillcrest rooters, comprised of family members and girlfriends of my teammates, sat back to enjoy the game. They knew me from happier, glory days in high school, but dared not look me in the face now. I was a baseball outcast, a pariah, a charity case. Meanwhile, I tried not to let all the negative vibes bother me. I bit my nails, admired my manicure and ruminated on how I had put myself in this unenviable position and what other summertime larks I could be pursuing right now instead of riding the pine.

I had an aqua-marine, Sixty-Seven Pontiac, Bonneville convertible with less than twenty-thousand miles on it and three hundred and seventy-six horses under the hood, sitting a couple hundred yards away out in the parking lot. Wouldn't it be nice to jump in that bad boy, lower the top, groove to some Oldies, take off down these Maryland country roads lined with leafy woods, tobacco fields and honeysuckle and tear through the sweet summer night air? Mann, I could be flyin' right now, rockin' down the highway! But here I was watching my younger teammates play ball, while I'm sitting here on my behind! Maybe I had outgrown this kid's game, anyway? It was amateur baseball, after all. It wasn't like any of us were getting paid to play, not in dollars and cents. No, payment came in the form of playing time. Playing time was the sole form of currency and, right now, I was getting stiffed!

Yeah, I had f'ed up big time back in May before the summer Legion season even started, when I had taken too long in coming home from my freshman year of college out on the West Coast. I had taken a bit of a detour on my return to visit with my paraplegic uncle in L.A., stayed too long and lost my timing, my batting timing, that is. By the time I got back home, literally on the eve of our Legion opener, three weeks

had passed since I had taken any live batting practice (BP) with my school team. So what'd I do the next day in our opener? I K'd four times, leaving guys on base, too. Four times! And we lost! Mann, I had only done that once before in my life, a year ago when I had tried to play a Babe Ruth game on one leg due to a leg injury. Well, quite rightly, our manager Mr. Campbell had benched me after the opener and I hadn't been on the playing field since. Like I said that was half a season ago on the first weekend of June and here it was the week after the Fourth of July. It was embarrassing. When Campbell wasn't ignoring me, he was passing snide remarks about me. It looked as if I was benched for the rest of the year. My starting teammates were embarrassed for me, opting not to notice me, treating me as if I had leprosy, afraid if they got too close to me, they, too, might catch the bench bug. Mad at myself, I had vowed to regain my timing and work my way back into the line-up. However, Campbell, having lost all confidence in me, totally ignored me no matter what I did or how well I performed in BP.

I glanced to my right, outside the fenced-in, first base bench near the water fountain, which was out-of-play, on the asphalt, down towards the right field foul line, where Bob Campbell and his assistant Jim Cosh stood chatting in their street clothes. I had known both Mr. Cosh and Mr. Campbell from the Boy's Club, where they had coached me in basketball and football, but never in baseball until last year, Hillcrest's first year in the Legion baseball program. Mr. Cosh lived a block up the street from me. He had always liked me and I often had heard him muttering to Campbell, lobbying in my behalf, to get me into the game. For my part, I had taken BP every chance I could, as well as hit soft tosses into a fence, using my own baseballs so Campbell couldn't chastise me for ruining the club's practice balls. I got my timing back and I was ready to play ball now, had been ready for some time. I caught the shorter, stockier Campbell's eye and he looked right through me. Campbell must have thought I was a prima donna, like a couple other hot dogs we had on this club, the "white spikes" kind of guys, who played only for themselves. But he was mistaken, I wasn't like that.

Don't get me wrong. Of course, we all played for ourselves, for the sheer fun of it, but the real prima donnas, the real hot dogs, acted as if their crap didn't stink, if you know what I mean. Both were new to the team this year. One of them, an athletic, powerful and swift outfielder, had just recently taken his white spikes and split the team. He had taken by place in the line-up. For all his glowing promise, he had hit about two for the first half of the year. However, one of his safeties had been a towering, majestic home run. Why Reggie Jackson did not have a sweeter swing than this dude and the way this cat had cadillacked his way around the bases after hitting his tater, Reggie could have taken notes on how it was done. Of course, this guy looked good striking out, too, flourishing the bat as if he were the Babe himself, a real hot dog with mustard all over him. And he did strike out! You bet he did!

The other one, the other jerk, thought he was God's gift to shortstops. He acted as if he was doing all of us a favor by playing Legion ball with us when he had other higher callings, other leagues after him. Tolerated initially, because he was a newbie to the club, this overgrown kid's arrogant, cavalier attitude was wearing out his welcome with the coaches fast. The players had already written him off. I could tell because when he hit one out in his first at bat to put us on the board tonight, few of my teammates congratulated him and those that did had to force themselves. I didn't bother. At least, he had hit better than his compatriot prima donna, Mr. White Shoes. Suffice to say, our dugout chemistry was sorely lacking. Much discord and ill will reigned over the club by now. The second half of the season looked as if it would prove to be worse than our once promising but ultimately disappointing, losing first half start of 4 and 6.

I sat on the bench and moped. Dang! *This* is what I had fought through cross-town traffic for? Grabbing a quick root beer and a Roy Rogers Double R Bar Burger, choking down what had tasted more like a bite of Trigger's ass? Was it hot and muggy or what? Gee! I had been installing an in-ground swimming pool for my brother's company on one of these typical Washington, DC, 90/90 summer days and now the night

wasn't feeling any cooler. Our cotton-polyester uniforms seemed to retain rather than repel heat. I wanted to take off my sleeveless outer shirt, so I could feel the bit of breeze that wafted by every so often, through my, short-sleeved, white and green inner shirt. However, I knew Campbell wouldn't allow that, because I had tried it before. I was miserable, as were my fellow bench-sitters. I never met a guy yet who liked riding the pine. I thought about strolling over to the first base stands behind our bench to converse with some of my teammates' girlfriends, but Campbell had quashed that before, too. Shoot, even my patron saint Mr. Cosh nixed any fraternizing. No, I was stuck here for the rest of the game, trying my best not to sweat. To make matters worse, we were getting our butts handed to us early and I could do nothing about it.

Our crafty, little, sixteen-year old southpaw Tommy Evans was getting into trouble in every inning. Only decent fielding of some our opponents' hot shots by some of our fielders had stemmed off total disaster. College Park was nailing our best pitcher. By winning the first half of the league season, College Park had already assured themselves one of the two postseason playoff spots. They were loose and having a great time over there on the third base side abusing us. Yeah our crafty little left-hander wasn't so crafty tonight. Tommy didn't have command of his out pitch, his curve ball, and without it, his fast ball was just batting practice stuff. Yet, Campbell left the kid in to get hung out to dry. And we weren't helping little Tommy out any with our bats, either. We mustered only that lone run off our diva's solo shot, while College Park was shelling us.

Campbell had been getting on our Hot Dog Number 1 for the kid's lackadaisical play at short. The guy was out there, getting no depth at his position, wearing a batting helmet and he wouldn't get down in defensive position before the pitch. When he did get ready, he slid his feet well outside of his shoulders and locked his knees, costing him any jump he could have gotten on a ball hit his way and severely limiting his range. When a couple of routine grounders eluded his glove, extending the inning unnecessarily, not to mention Little Tommy's earned run average, Campbell blasted the jerk from the bench, rightly so and about time, too. Hot dog that he was: the kid blasted right back at Campbell for everyone to hear. The two carried on a running argument until the end of the inning when the prima donna jogged off the field. Campbell intercepted the guy in front of the bench and the two went at each other. It was difficult to tell if the kid quit before Campbell kicked him off the club or visa-versa.

Shortly after that fiasco, Campbell pulled Tommy and inserted the sandy mustachioed, moon-faced Mac into pitch. With that move, I noticed Campbell had cost himself the luxury of the designated hitter, because Mac had been our DH. By this point, down eleven to one, our team was dead in the water. First place College Park was kicking our collective asses here, as we headed into the top of the seventh. Without thinking, I clapped and talked it up a bit, just for the hell of it. "Come on Mac, Come on Keed! You're the man, Mac!" My sullen bench mates, looked at me as if I had gone daft. Suddenly, I had an idea. I had a really good idea! I started talking it up loud—Big Time. I stood up and leaned over the fence

"Come on Mac, shoot 'em down, shoot 'em down Keed! You the man, Mac. You the man. Bring that heat, Baby." I clapped heartily. Problem was: Mac's heat wasn't much warmer than lukewarm.

Nevertheless, Mac looked at me and nodded. He got the message, so did Campbell. I glanced over at our fearless leader and one look told me all I needed to know. He was shooting daggers at me. He wanted me to go quietly into that gentle good night, like a dying elephant off to its graveyard. He had been ignoring and humiliating me every chance he had gotten since our opener. I had tried everything I could to get back into his good graces, by keeping score, carrying the equipment to his car and such, but nothing had worked. The guy had a sadistic streak and he seemed to enjoy watching me twist in the wind. Now I was going to stick it to him.

Please understand: all the noise during the game had been generated by the College Park side of the field, behind third base. Our side had been dead. Down 11 to 1 in the seventh, we were fortunate there was no ten-run slaughter rule. Now Mac had given up a couple of hits, leaving two on with one gone. With our situation seemingly hopeless, I stood up, draped my arms over the fence, nestling my armpits into the rail and clapped loudly. Joel Osteen could not have offered any more heartfelt, sincere, positive encouragement than I did for Mac.

“Hey now! Hey now! Come you Mac, come you can Keed! You can do it Big Mac! Shoot ‘em down, shoot ‘em down, Keed!”

Mac walked the bases full, but I kept up the high volume banter and gave Campbell the eye. Campbell was in a bind. My cheering was tiptoeing a fine line between a never-say-die enthusiasm and the obnoxious, but he couldn't tell me to shut up without looking like he had given up on the game which, let's face it, was a lost cause. My bench mates noticed I had gotten under Campbell's skin and they rose as one to join me in my voluble exhortations. My mates were ticked off with Campbell as well, for the way he had kowtowed earlier to the “white shoes” guys, while ignoring them and for his preseason broken promises to them of victories and playing time. He had wooed my teammates away from the Babe Ruth and Boy's Club summer leagues, where they could have played more, to come and play for this, this supposed high all school all-star team to win a championship. Like me, they sensed the irony of the situation. We hung over the fence rail together and started beating on the chain-link with the flats of our hands, while we shouted encouragement to Mac and the rest of the team in the field. Mac had gotten one out but then he had walked the bases full. Mr. Cosh was whispering into Campbell's ear down by the water fountain. We hooted louder for Mac and slapped the fence harder. It was beautiful. I thought now here was a mutiny only Captain Bligh could have appreciated. And I was Mr. Christian. Our now silent opponents stared dumbly at us as if we were nuts.

With the bases full and one gone in the top of the seventh, Campbell trekked to the mound to confer with Mac and our catcher Tut Thomas. Campbell had had the good sense to warm up the red-headed Neal Zurowski at the start of the inning, so Neal was ready to go. Campbell took the baseball from Mac but kept his bat in the lineup by sending him to right field. Then Campbell surprised me. He brought Seegert in from center to catch and benched Tut, while he inserted me into left field to hit in Tut's number nine slot in the batting order. Campbell shifted our left fielder to center to make room for me. Shoot, I didn't even know Seegert could catch. I guess Campbell figured he'd make me put up or shut up. Suddenly, after five weeks of gathering imaginary, aluminum splinters, I was in the game. Amidst plenty of pats on the back, I grabbed my new Rawlings glove and hustled out to left.

Stepping onto the field made me feel like Neil Armstrong must have felt stepping on the moon and taking one giant leap for my kind (the overlooked bench warmers of the world) so alien did the territory feel beneath my spikes. My teammates were happy for me, hoping I was just the first of them to get into this lost cause. It was solidarity at its purest. One of their own (me) had gotten into the game and, before long; they hoped a couple of them would take the field as well. Campbell was waiting for Neal to come in and take the ball out of his hand. He stood on the mound, smirking at me, as I ran past him. I could read his mind as I passed by: *All right asshole, you wanted in the game, now you're in. Can't wait to watch you foul it up.* I just gave him a hard stare in return.

I had brought a ball with me so I could warm up with Maxwell who had shifted into center. As I began to get loose, I notice several things right away and all of them were bad. First, all the runs and all the pitching changes had made for a long game. I hadn't thrown a ball in a few hours. I was tight. I wasn't prepared to play mentally, either. I never thought Campbell would put me in the game. Shoot! I hadn't played in over a month and I hadn't played a night game in over a year! We didn't play night games in

college. Glancing up at the lights now, I noticed a glare in my peripheral vision from my seldom-used hard contact lenses. (I had been earning my keep days by digging swimming pools and concluded all that sweat, dirt and sand did not mix well with hard contact lenses on my eyeballs, so I wasn't used to wearing the hard contacts.) Finally, I had a new glove, which I never had used in a game situation before. The well of the pocket was still a little stiff, hard to close, but my old glove, which I still carried in my bag, was finished. I had patched it up once too often. If I caught the ball wrong in the webbing of that old Spalding, the pill would pierce the glove and hit me in the face.

I think I took more warm-up tosses than Neal, who was usually a starting hurler but was now employed in relief. Campbell had slated Neal to pitch our next game two days from now on Thursday and that's probably why he had been reluctant to bring Neal in earlier. But Neal was in now with bases filled against him and he struck out the first batter he faced to get the second out of the inning. I kept up the banter from my spot in left and the other fielders took up the gauntlet, chatting it up, as well. However fragile, we seemed to have new life, though the score remained 11 to 1 and the sacks were still loaded against us.

With two down, their right-handed pitcher came up batting lefty. He swung and lofted a towering fly out to me in left. I drifted in under it and froze, as the ball soared high above the light stanchions. My pins were unsteady beneath me, like a sailor who didn't have his land legs yet.

"I can do this," I told myself. "Can o' corn, no problemo."

Geeze! I thought that thing would never come down. With two down and no fear of being doubled up, College Park runners were circling the bases like mad. Looking up, I had my glove above eye level but I had to fight against the glare from the lights bouncing off my contacts. I get under it and, finally, the ball plops into my glove only to carom right back out several feet up into the air, shooting up like a boomeranging bazooka! I had squeezed my glove but the stiff pocket had failed to respond. I was so mad, I could have killed somebody. I should have repositioned myself with my glove under the ball, which had squirted several feet above my head in front of my right shoulder. But I was so angry and I so did not trust my glove, that all I could think to do was let the ball fall until I could snatch it out of the air with my bare, right hand. And that's exactly what I did. I reached up and out and swung my opened hand downward angrily as the ball was dropping just above eye level and, with the palm of my hand, snatched the thing right out of mid-air for the third out. I was lucky I didn't slap the thing to the ground. When I looked up, I saw the batter, who was halfway to third, shake his head and kick the dirt of the base path. Our opponents started riding me as I, angrily but gratefully, trotted across the diamond into our bench. They knew I had been the one with the mouth on the other side, shepherding a hopeless cause, so they really let me have it for nearly blowing an easy play with the bases jammed.

As I came into the dugout, Neal accosted me with a wry smile curling the corners of his lips and said, "Hey Mann! You really put excitement back into the routine fly ball." I grinned self-consciously and mumbled something about my glove being new and my contacts bothering me. Campbell overheard and yelled that I should have taken care of that before I had gone out into the field and how a guy of my experience should know that. I seethed, but he was right. I went and changed into my black frame glasses and found my old glove at the bottom of my gym bag. I was able to right my equipment issues and talk it up some more, while we rallied. For the first time all night, we showed some life at the plate. My circus catch of a "routine fly," as Neal had put it, seemed to ignite our collective pride. This was the bottom of the seventh in a nine-inning game. We filled the bases and brought home a run. With two down and the bases filled, I strode to the plate for the first time in five weeks!

However, unlike earlier, when I had taken the field to play defense, I was confident now. Hitting was my meat and I felt strong. I stepped into the right handed batter's box ready to bust one, knowing that, with the bases full, the pitcher would have to come into me. He had pitched the entire game for them so far. He threw right-handed with a three-quarters motion of delivery. I had my timing back and I knew this pitcher.

I had faced him my senior year of high school. He had an explosive fastball and one heck of a downer. That thing dropped off the table and, to make matters worse, he threw it with darn near the same velocity as his fastball. You didn't have time to double clutch on it and shoot it the other way, out to right. You had to guess with him. That's what I had done a year ago against him in high school when I had guessed right once out of three times. Now, I noticed he had lost command of his curve ball this inning, just as Little Tommy had for us earlier for us. So I was going to be looking fastball all the way.

All the guys on the bench were up and cheering for me, as were those on the bases. Even Campbell, from his third base coaching box, was giving me a phony, half-hearted encouragement. However, the smirking expression on his face told me he expected me to fail, which strengthened my resolve to succeed even more. With a run in, the score stood 11 to 2 against us. The pitcher tried to curve me, but he couldn't get it in there for a strike. Because this was the first time in a month that I had hit in a game, I was grateful the guy had trouble finding the plate; he gave me a chance to get my bearings. I worked the count to three and one. Give Campbell credit, he let me hit away and that's exactly what I did. I opened my stance a hair so I could clear my hips on the inside fastball. I gauged the kid's delivery and I got the fastball I was expecting and —boom —shot it smartly right past the pitcher's ankles. As he fell away on his follow-through towards the first base line, the ball proved too quick for him. It darted out past the shortstop's side of second base bag through the infield into center for a base hit, driving in a run to make it 11 to 3.

Our guys were going crazy now. From the water fountain, Mr. Cosh gave me a wink and nodded across the diamond to Campbell in the third base box, as if to say "I told ya so." I was happy. You bet I was, but we still had a long way to go to come back. The top of the order was due up in the presence of Bobby Niff who, though only a rising senior, was probably our best ballplayer. Unlike the prima donnas, Niff was not a "white shoes" kind of guy at all. He was as traditional and rock solid as you could want any teammate to be. Why Campbell had him leading off though, instead of batting third, was a mystery to me. Maybe Campbell had a crystal ball after all and he knew this bases-loaded, come-from-behind situation would arise. I don't know. And why the College Park manager left his pitcher in to face Niff, I'll never know, either. Niff was no dummy. He knew their pitcher couldn't get his curve over, too.

I took my lead, keeping a wary eye on the first baseman, who was playing off the bag behind me at double-pay depth. Niff had to go up there, looking fast ball, as I had done. I watched Bobby and rooted for him as he stood in there at the plate like DiMaggio. Bobby Niff has a short, compact but powerful swing, kind of like Steve Garvey. I was leading off first base and clapping for Bobby, when he got the fastball he was looking for: BOOM!!!!!!

The concussion of bat on ball sounded like the crack of a rifle splitting the still, country, summer night air. I knew it was gone the second I heard it. The pill took off like a rocket to dead center field. My head whipped to the right to follow its rocket-rapid flight. The ball was still rising as it disappeared halfway up in the fifty foot tall trees in the woods behind the little stadium. I circled the bases, clapping my hands. Bobby cantered around the bases quickly, head down, careful not to show up the opposing hurler. That was Bobby. No, he was never a "white shoes" kind of guy, never a hot dog. And just like that, the score stood 11 to 7 and, suddenly, a victory seemed possible. We were still down four, but we were back in the game with over two innings left to play. Mann! Another slammer like that one and we would be all tied up. Our guys were going crazy and College Park, those first place hot shots, seemed to lose some of their swagger, like some air had just been let out of their collective balloon.

College Park replaced their pitcher. (A little late, I thought.) Their new pitcher retired Charlie, our number two hitter to end the inning. But what a shot in the arm was Bobby Niff's slammer! We took the field for the eighth invigorated with new life. Neal responded to the challenge. He set College Park down in the eighth without incident. Those CP guys on the third base bench acted now as if they were on life support

even though they still held a four-run lead. I passed some of their players coming onto the field as I was coming off and they were dazed. They had completely lost their swagger. In our half of the eighth, we tallied three more runs, largely on the strength of Ronnie Miller's two-run homer over the right center field fence, and knocked out yet another CP pitcher. The inning ended with me on deck and us down by just one measly run: 11 to 10.

As he had in the eighth, Neal took care of business again in the top of the ninth, shutting out College Park for the third inning in a row. Like my teammates, I came off the field pumped up. We knew, we were going to take these guys in the bottom half, our half, of the inning. I mean, we just *knew* it. It was only a question of how. My confidence was as high as the team's. I was leading off our half of the inning and I couldn't wait to score the tying run. We had nine-one-two due up. College Park had inserted yet another pitcher so I crept as close to the plate as I dared to watch his warm-up tosses. I didn't see anything special with this cat, nothing new, certainly nothing overpowering. I was ready. My bench mates were ready, too. They were really hooting and hollering now. What a difference a couple innings had made! Now College Park was the team moping around. They acted as if they were about to stick their collective heads under the guillotine.

Yeah, I was about to step into the batter's box, furtively checking down third at the third baseman, to see if maybe I should drop one down, when, suddenly and without warning – POOOFFF! The lights went out, literally. Every light stanchion in the place went out all at the same time, even the ones behind us over on the empty softball diamond. I couldn't believe it. No one could. We all stood there with our mouths agape and our thumbs up our collective asses in complete and utter astonishment in utter blackness. For the first time, we heard only the chirping of crickets. Everything was black. I could barely make out the ump and their catcher who were standing practically right next to me. I couldn't make out their pitcher or anyone else for that matter and the pitcher was just sixty feet away from me. It is said that the absence of light is darkness. I never fully grasped what that meant until this moment. Thomas Edison should have hung his head in shame. From the stands and benches on both sides of the diamond, whispers of wonderment gave way to shouts, cackles and catcalls. We waited for the lights to come back on, but they remained as dark as tombs. The umpire ordered the players to return to their respective benches. Campbell and Cosh went to confer with the umps and the CP coaches at home plate. Understand: we were out in the country. Watkins Park was a new recreational facility, situated out in the boonies of central Prince George's County. There were no other lights. The night was dark and cloudy, no moon, no stars, no nothing, just black.

After a prolonged discussion with the umpires, and the CP coaches, Campbell and Cosh came back to the bench to give us the bad news. The lights were on some kind of programming mechanism and they were sequenced to go off at midnight. (The fricking game had started at eight p.m. and with the twenty-one runs scored and the many pitching changes that were made, the contest had labored on to reach the bewitching hour.) Campbell gave us the ruling on the game. He said that there were no park personnel available to turn the lights back on. The game and would be finished only if the outcome would make a difference in selecting the second half winner for the play-offs. Otherwise, the score would revert to what it was at the top of the ninth, which was still 11 to 10.

WHAT!!! You gotta be kiddin' me!

Quite understandably, my guys and I were shocked, stunned even, by this nefarious turn of events. We had those hotshot, first place bastards over there hanging on the ropes, hanging by a thread. They were on life support for cripes' sake. All we had to do to snuff them out was pull the plug. We griped and moaned and bitched, but there was nothing we could do about it. To a man, we all knew we had been jobbed. We all knew that if those lights were to come back on right now, we'd kick their league-leading butts and

finish this thing in fine fashion with a big “W” for our side. As we dutifully collected our equipment and hauled our gear back to the cars waiting in the parking lot, we had to be careful. We had to stick together, teammates and girlfriends alike; otherwise, we would have gotten lost in the dark. A funny thing happened on that walk. We stayed together and talked about how we had comeback, without the “hot dogs,” the much ballyhooed “white spikes” guys, no less. And I offered that if we would stick together from now on, as we just had on the field and as we were now, walking here in the dark, we would be OK for the rest of the season.

And that’s exactly what we did boys and girls. You can bet I started the rest of the way, too. We won seven of our last nine games to finish the overall season with a winning record. No, we didn’t get into the play-offs and we never did get to finish the bottom of the ninth to complete our comeback, but we did, collectively as a club and as individuals, regain our self respect and finish the year with happy memories. To this day, there is no doubt in my mind that we would have won that game if the lights had stayed on. No doubt whatsoever. There is also no doubt that, had we won a vindicating victory, that event would not have been as memorable as when the lights had cut out on us, so cruelly and unjustly at the midnight hour. Certainly, it would not have been memorable enough to record thirty-eight years later anyway.

The lesson I learned: *You’re never down too far to come back--*provided there is no ten-run slaughter rule.

Post Script

Baseball is a special game, beautifully unique from all others, with special rules that make it so. It is not a game where the object is to shoot a ball through a goal or over a line or to knock out someone with one’s fist or to pin them to the ground. On the contrary, baseball is a gentlemanly contest, which has as its sole object that one team “come home safely” more often than its opponent. What could be more humane, more civilized than that? Baseball is a distinguished game, which aspires to a higher calling than do other sports, and thus is a more noble incentive for mankind to pursue. In addition, there is another inviolate principle of this special game. It is the principle of timelessness, which should have remained inviolate that memorable night thirty-eight years ago.

Baseball has no time limit. Baseball ... suspends time. Think of it. The clock never expires on a baseball game because baseball supersedes the physical dimension of time.

Thus, there should be nothing arbitrary about the end of a baseball contest. Only when each club has had its fair opportunity to outscore, that is to “come home safely” more often than its opponent, does the game conclude and not before. No, the clock does not dictate in baseball, as it does in other sports. As it does in life. Thirty-eight years ago, events and the umpires conspired arbitrarily to overturn this time-honored tradition of timelessness inherent to the greatest game ever invented. I submit that for a lighting glitch to end a ballgame before it had run its full course not only runs contrary to the time-honored traditions of the game itself, it is downright un-American! I conclude that if the physical dimension of time can and should never terminate a baseball game, then neither should the failure of any mere invention of mortal man, such as the electric light bulb.