

THE GAME

By Teresa Smyser

The screen door banged shut as I ran through the house waving my white envelope.

“Dad! Dad!”

“Back here, son.”

Out of breath, I stumbled to a stop at his recliner. “Guess what I have?”

His eyes widened. “I have no idea.”

I ripped open the envelope and pulled out two tickets. “We’re going to the World Series!”

He took them in his hand as Mom’s head popped around the corner of the kitchen doorway. “What’s all the excitement?”

Floating over to her on cloud nine, I grabbed her waist and twirled her around. “Dad and I are going to game seven of the World Series next week.” I kissed her cheek as she clutched the cabinet to steady herself.

Wearing a big grin, Dad handed the tickets to me. “Are you sure there’ll be a game seven?”

I flopped on the couch. “Of course, Dad. The Reds won’t let those Oakland A’s beat them. Losing the first game was a fluke. You’ll see. It’ll go down to the wire unless the Reds win the next four straight which is possible with Pete Rose on the team.”

Dad smiled and shook his head. “I hope you’re right. It will be my first World Series to see in person.”

After WWII, my dad had pitched on a Community Baseball Team for five years before family and work stripped away his free time. As his only son, he gave me pitching instructions all through little league and now high school. I often kept him out until dark playing catch. With my part-time job, I could now afford to share this great adventure with my dad.

Following a couple of rain delays during the series, game seven of the 1972 World Series was a certainty. Elated to have predicted accurately, the weekend couldn’t come soon enough.

On a crisp October Sunday, I placed my favorite Reds ballcap on my head. My dad, along with my two friends, David, and Tommy, piled into my 1964 Ford Galaxy and headed to Cincinnati, OH. During the hour and a half drive, we talked baseball. Tommy had been my catcher in Babe Ruth League, and David just loved the game. Excitement filled the car.

At last, Riverfront Stadium came into sight! Incredible! World Series banners and pennants flapped in the breeze welcoming all the fans. On the way to the gate, my feet glided just above the ground anticipating the best day of my life.

The crowd pressed together as we maneuvered the massive ramp leading into the stadium. Our tickets took us to the top deck. When the four of us emerged into the sunlight, we viewed the enormous arena that held 50,000 people, and it was sold out for the day's game.

I looked at the other three. "Did you guys smell those delicious hotdogs and popcorn?"

Dad's brows wiggled up and down. "I was hoping we'd capture a dog or two."

While ordering our food, I bought my dad his first Reds' ballcap. His eyes twinkled with delight as he settled it in place. With food in hand, it took skill to avoid being jostled as we hiked back to our seats. Now to watch batting practice.

In the first inning, Catfish Hunter held the Reds to no runs, while the Oakland A's took the lead with one run. I kept my disappointment in check as Pete Rose, also known as Charlie Hustle, scored in the fifth inning.

I cheered and clapped. "Pete Rose is one of the best players in baseball."

Tommy argued that Johnny Bench was the best. I didn't care. I knew I was right.

By the sixth inning, the Reds pitcher walked two men. My dad shook his head in disgust. "Those walks will come back to haunt us."

I'd heard my dad say those exact words all through my baseball career. This was one time I hated his accuracy. Oakland scored two runs in the sixth inning on a Reds' error. An error of all things. I jumped up and yelled my displeasure. My team was better than this!

Reds scored again in the eighth inning, but it was now the ninth and we trailed by one run. Two outs and Pete Rose to bat. I sat on the edge of my seat. "Pete will come through."

He hit the ball. I launched to my feet. Pete flew around the bases ... until ... the ball was caught. Out three. Game over. Stunned, my fist punched the air as I cursed the winning team. A warm hand touched my arm.

I looked into my dad's disappointed eyes. "Son, you can't win them all. Let's go."

Shamed, I followed the guys wondering how to redeem the day. I didn't want to ruin my dad's experience. In the parking lot, I put my arm around his shoulder. "You were right, Dad. Walks came back to haunt us." He grinned and started reliving the game. Redeemed by my father, my step lightened.

Years later my dad passed away before we made it to another World Series. The memory of our time at the 1972 game turned out to be more precious than gold.