

A Day of Salvation

By Roy Branson

My mother the missionary shouted out encouragement to Stan Musial, Enos Slaughter, Red Schoendienst, and the rest of the St. Louis Cardinals. One other fan did the same—loudly and incessantly. The rest of us were silent. After all, this was Ebbets Field on a weekday in 1951, and the Brooklyn Dodgers were losing.

For eight long innings the Dodgers had hardly heard a peep of support. True, every time an opposing player struck out, a small band behind the Dodgers dug out played a dirge until the opposing player sat down—to a raucously jarring chord. And the Dodger announcer tried to remain upbeat. But there was absolutely nothing to cheer about. The Cardinals were walking, getting on base through errors, then hitting double after double, knocking in everybody who got on base. By the bottom of the eighth, Musial and company were ahead 9-0!

My mother never let up. Inning after inning, she took turns with the Cardinal's fan, urging the Cardinals on, jeering my heroes in blue.

My mother had been raised by her father, a missionary to Indonesia who had established two colleges. She married a preacher who had taken her and the

rest of the family to Cairo, Egypt. After we survived World War II, my father established a senior college in Beirut, Lebanon (where my mother taught algebra to students from all over the Middle East). The Christian colleges her father and husband established continue to educate the young in the way that they should go. But being surrounded by two generations of religious fervor on several continents had not dimmed my mother's fanaticism for baseball.

Within a month of my father becoming the president of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Mom got me on a subway and out to Ebbets Field. (It was years before Dad went to a game, and only because we had out-of-town visitors who insisted.) Before Ebbets Field, before the Middle East and World War II, as a young pastor's wife in St. Louis, my mother had rooted for the Gashouse



Gang—Leo Duroucher at shortstop, Frankie Frisch at second, with Dizzy Dean and his brother Paul on the mound. On hot, air-conditionless summer afternoons, while she ironed shirts, mother listened to the radio and cheered the Cardinals on their long march to the 1934 National League pennant.

By the time the Cardinals were playing Detroit in the World Series, my father, the pastor of the six-hundred-member downtown St. Louis Adventist church, was holding evangelistic meetings in the downtown arena, seating a thousand people. Preaching three nights a week, he had gotten through Adventist teaching on the Sabbath, the image of Daniel 2, and the “Mark of the Beast.” But before he could lay out the “Signs of the End,” the Cardinals were playing the Tigers in the last game of the World Series.

As the service started, the Cardinals were ahead. Soon, car horns started honking and the cars backfiring; fire crackers went off at a faster and faster pace.

People inside the hall began having a hard time hearing the speaker. Dad bowed to the inevitable and cut short his evangelist sermon, the “Time of the End.” It turned out that Dizzy, on only one day’s rest, had pitched a complete game shutout—11-0! In downtown St. Louis, the honking and shouting and cheering of the Cardinals’ victory went on most of the night.

From St. Louis my parents returned to the mission service in which they had been raised. In Cairo and Beirut my brother and I grew up in the “true faith” with the help of *Time* magazine and the Armed Services Radio Network. I learned to read by comparing the words of *Time*’s sports section with the descriptions of the World Series I heard on the radio: Mel Allen chronicling the heroic struggles of Don Newcombe and Preacher Roe against Allie Reynolds, Vic Raschi, and the rest of the Yankee’s dynasty. In the face of defeat after defeat at the hands of the rich and powerful, I never lost hope that Jackie Robinson and the forces of righteousness would ultimately prevail.

But that first afternoon of seeing baseball face-to-face, not just hearing it, tested my faith. And my

mother was part of the problem. Far from comforting me, she was cheering the oppressors. For some reason, into the bottom of the eighth inning, she still wasn’t hoarse. I was furious. She was rooting, after all, against not just any team, but the Dodgers!

She was booing Jackie Robinson, for heaven’s sakes! How could any self-respecting person do that? She was lining herself up against integration, against racial harmony, against goodness and light. I was twelve, and brought up by two generations of missionaries to recognize a battle in the war

between good and evil. And my own mother was on the side of the powers of darkness.

Then God struck. It was not thunder and lightning. No home runs, no triples. Just the gentle dew of singles, interrupted by the occasional flash of a double. But the forces of goodness were irresistible. In the bottom of the eighth, Duke Snider, Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella, and Gil Hodges pushed across four runs. In the bottom of the ninth, the Boys of Summer

scored five runs to win the ball game.

The Cardinals’ fan had slipped out. He was nowhere to be found. My mother was smiling as broadly at me as when she had been cheering the Cardinals. Perhaps faithful devotion to the Dodgers could co-exist, after all, with loyalty to my parents.

My confidence in salvation history remained untroubled for years. I was fifteen before I got around to worrying about why the innocent suffered and died in the Holocaust. Of course, no fully satisfying answer has yet arrived. One continues to believe, however, the way one believes in a God who inexplicably permitted Ebbets Field to be destroyed and the Dodgers to be taken to a far country; but also a God whose faithful agents I witnessed rise up one afternoon in Brooklyn and triumph gloriously.

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