

## MY DIE-HARD FATHER

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[Assignment: Using Thomas's essay "Memories of Christmas" as a model, write your own childhood recollection. Aim for vibrant description but don't neglect a statement of purpose that you will have to determine for yourself before beginning to write.]

(1) There I sat; I was in the same position that I had been in for endless hours. I was in the midst of a scene typical in any hospital: the close relatives expressing their deep concern, the nauseating odor lurking throughout the hospital wing, and the scenic pictures, with good intentions of comfort, hanging in the waiting rooms and hallways. The doors leading to the Cardiac Care Unit were the dominant, central feature of my view. They seemed not only to symbolize, but to actually be the gates separating heaven and hell, life and death. I stared at the door as intently as a hawk stalks its prey, only I was not searching for prey, but for anyone who was the bearer of good news. At any other time, those "gates" would have been just another set of doors to me, but it was different now because my father was inside those "gates"; he was fighting for his right to re-enter the gates of life after nearly suffering a fatal heart attack.

(2) Even though I could not see my father through the doors, I had formed a very clear silhouette image of him lying on his hospital bed, attached to numerous machines and surrounded by a team of specialists. My mind began to focus on just my father's face. As I looked down at him, the vision of his face began to make me remember all the good times I had experienced with him. As my mind shuffled through the memories of birthdays, family vacations, and holidays, it came to a quick stop when remembering the afternoons of baseball with my dad. Since I was a young child, my father had always enjoyed not only playing baseball with me, but also discussing and sharing his opinions of the game with me. Because my father and I shared a great love of baseball as a common bond, the memories I have of playing baseball with him on those sultry summer Saturdays are some of the greatest memories of my childhood.

(3) My father was forty-six years old when I was born. By the time I had grown up enough to actively participate in any sports, my father was in his early fifties. By this time, it would have been natural for him to use his age as an excuse not to participate in athletic activities with me. To the contrary, my father's age did not limit him in any way. Of all his activities with me, baseball was his favorite. Baseball has played a large part in our lives, both in the past and now in the present. My father developed his taste for baseball while living on the north side of Chicago. Thus he grew up a loyal Cubbies fan. He developed into an elite member of the "Die-hard Cub Fan Club." My Dad slowly and gently moved me into the same club. There were certain rules of the club that my father often expressed in his actions, if not his words. One of the most important rules of this club was that all members had to subscribe to the opinion that the worst nightmare for a Cub Fan was a St. Louis Cardinal Fan. The fact that my father and I lived in a town only sixty miles from the

Cardinals' home meant that our lives were a constant nightmare: Cardinal Fans everywhere!

( 4 ) When Saturdays came, Dad always made time for baseball practice with me even if it was late in the day or he was really too busy. Nothing stood in the way of our baseball practice, but one thing did inconvenience it. On extremely hot days, Dad would limit himself just a bit--he would position himself under the nearest shade tree to take batting practice. On any normal Saturday, though, my father and I would make the ritual trek out to the ball diamond in our backyard. I was equipped with the same ballglove that my sisters had used a thousand times over when they were younger. In my family, there were four girls and no boys, which meant my father was definitely not a male chauvinist. Although I was the biggest baseball fan, all my sisters enjoyed sports and were athletically very active. Their ballglove had been passed to me. My father used his trusty old wooden bat that had been well used by my older sisters also. (Aluminum bats never held any water with Dad.) With our equipment in place and my heart racing excitedly, our batting practices would begin. Positioned in the grass of left field, I eagerly waited to hear the crack of his bat signal to me that there was another baseball in play that I could dive after or run down.

( 5 ) My father and I were dreamers also. I was the idolized left fielder for the Cubs: Gary "Sarge" Mathews. My father was lucky enough to have a dual role. Not only was he the Cubbies' former Hall-of-Fame announcer Jack Brickhouse, but he was also the Cubs' star first baseman Leon "Bull" Durham. Dad had a speech that he would recite each time his bat connected with the ball. His exact words are etched in my memory: "The Bull steps up to the plate. The pitch. He swings. Dank-and-sock-o, there goes a long fly ball! It is over the left field wall! HOME RUN!

( 6 ) My eyes did refocus and my mind did return from its journey into my childhood memories and fantasies that day as I sat in the Cardiac Care Unit Waiting Room. The memories of my father helped to pass those long, anxious days in the waiting room. They also helped my family to remain in a positive mood and to continue to pray for Dad. Fortunately, our positive thoughts and prayers and his die-hard, fighting attitude helped Dad to survive and recover from his near heart attack and resulting quintuple by-pass surgery. My father and I now have many more years to make even more great memories. He, Jack Brickhouse, and I, "Sarge" Mathews, will also be able to spend many more years together waiting for the Cubbies to finally win a World Series.