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Lissa Brewer
lbrewer@dailyastorian.com

WEEKEND BREAK

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FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME

Coaching a Little League baseball team

By ROLAND HAERTL
For The Astorian

In February 1968, I was asked to coach a newly formed baseball team. As assistant coach. The request came from the head coach. On its face it was an honor. But there was a condition attached. If my son wanted to play baseball with the team, I had to volunteer to coach as an assistant. In a sport of which I knew nothing. On a newly formed team.

A Little League team.

Nine-year-old and 10-year-old boys. If coach Tom's son and my son wanted to play baseball, Tom and I were coaching.

So that was it.

I had zero knowledge of the game. What I knew I had acquired from watching some World Series games. Tom had much explaining to do. To me. And then let's make it fun for the boys.

Sixteen boys had signed up for our team. Tom arranged for the necessary equipment. The boys had to arrive with their own gloves. The team furnished the rest: balls, bats, base bags. Tom decided to hold a first evaluation session. We wanted to find out about the boys' fitness and skill level. Every boy arrived with a glove. We paired the boys, forming two-boy teams, separating the partners by approximately 30 feet. We handed each pair one ball and asked them to throw it to their partner. Who should catch the thrown ball?

Problem one.

Eight of the boys appeared to have never thrown a baseball. Of the other eight four of them were reasonably accurate getting their throws within catching range of their partner. We immediately designated them as potential pitchers. The other four could throw, just off-target. This exercise addressed pitching and fielding. Tom and I spent the next half hour with individual throwing instruction.

Then Tom and I looked at the general fitness and agility level. Our second task was clear. Get the boys physically conditioned.

We capped the session with five laps of jogging around the baseball diamond at Portland Heights Park next to Strohecker's store. It was flat. Tom and I decided to move practice to Hamilton Park at

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A youth baseball team plays a game at Tapiola Park in 2017.
Colin Murphey/The Astorian

Take us out to the ballgame

By ANN DUDLEY
For The Astorian

Many years ago, right around the time I was dating a man that played nonprofessional baseball who started to teach me how to throw, my brother Peter and I made a decision.

We wanted to go to Major League Baseball games. Neither of us had been to one since leaving the Bay Area 30 years prior. When I think about it, I was the first one to go to a Mariners game. By myself. I took the train up and had booked a room at the Four Seasons, telling myself that it was within walking distance of the ballpark and train station. My seat was six rows back and behind home plate. I was a rookie. I didn't know that the seat that I had bought came with a buffet dinner and free drinks. I ate dinner before I went to the game. But I had a ball. I loved the relaxing train trip, the hotel of course, and especially the game.

I convinced my brother he needed to go. That next trip, Peter and I drove up and back to Seattle in one day to catch an evening game. That was a long day. I remember scaring the crap out of myself when I nodded off for a split second while driving home.

It turns out, Peter loved the experience of being in the ballpark, as did I. It's like going back in time. The food, the people, the fans who bring their baseball gloves and carry their clipboards to tally every play of the game whether it be a hit, walk or error. My brother and I decided we wanted to branch out.

Then came San Francisco where we sat on the first baseline with a beautiful view of the bay. My oldest brother and his wife drove down from Santa Rosa and sat in a different section. The game was against the Dodgers, and where they were sitting, fights broke out. We were fine up in the second tier and were surprised to hear of their experience.

The game itself is almost secondary to the experience of the crowd, the ballpark itself, and, of course, the food. The ever-present fear that we will be selected for the kiss cam is real. Thankfully, it's never happened, and pray it never will.

In 2012, I got a bee in my bonnet that we should go to a World Series game. I snagged

two tickets to Game 2 of the Giants/Tigers World Series. The series where the Giants swept it. Peter always says that was the most expensive hot dog he's ever eaten. Again, we sat on the first baseline. We were struck by the man behind us. He was tall and thin and was a nonstop eating machine. From hot dogs to crab cakes, he had it all. That was the game that one of the sing-alongs was "City By The Bay" and on the giant screen popped Steve Perry in his box, singing along and waving an invisible conductor's baton.

We've gone farther afield, and our trips have gotten longer to accommodate travel days and exploring new-to-us cities. We've been to Chicago, Denver, Pittsburgh, Milwaukee and Boston, our favorite park so far. Our first stop at the ball park is always

the team store to buy a hat to commemorate our trip. We always root for the home team, although it was hard when we watched the Cubs/Giants game at Wrigley Field.

Peter and I go to one game on the trip. The rest of the time we investigate the local city and surrounding area. We research the regional things to eat and invariably go on a ghost tour one night, the best one being in Denver, followed by Boston. We share a room because it's cheaper and I can convince him to level up a few notches since we're pooling our funds.

Each city has its own brand of fan and every game has its own personality. We've had hot dogs at every park, marveling at the distinctness of each one. The game in Denver was delayed by two hours for rain. The fans got drunker and drunker,

and surlier as the delay continued. We always stay until the last pitch is thrown, and in that case, we were glad we did. Having been behind the entire game, the Rockies began scoring run after run and ended up winning the game with a bases loaded walk with the count at 3-2 on the last out.

In Boston the woman who sat next to me decided to take us under her wing and explained all sorts of Red Sox trivia. I remember her, and not what she told us. One night we walked to the North End where we waited in line at Giacomo's for some of the

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THE GAME ITSELF IS ALMOST SECONDARY TO THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CROWD, THE BALLPARK ITSELF, AND, OF COURSE, THE FOOD. THE EVER-PRESENT FEAR THAT WE WILL BE SELECTED FOR THE KISS CAM IS REAL. THANKFULLY, IT'S NEVER HAPPENED, AND PRAY IT NEVER WILL.

