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Washington Senators, Where Are You?

Paul was transferred back to Washington, D.C. Although he had lived there, I never had; I found the prospect of living in the nation's capital very exciting as we drove across the continent from Portland in the spring of 1945. My first object was to find us a place to live, not a simple task in the war time capital. I crisscrossed the District from where we were staying with Jean, Paul's brother's wife, in Southeast Washington, learning the system of streets and discovering the Fourteenth Street and the Memorial Bridges across the Potomac into Arlington and Alexandria, Virginia. Occasionally I would find hills from which I located heaps of red bricks which frequently signaled apartment complexes. Most apartments had such long waiting lists that they wouldn't consider taking our application for housing. Every day I started out with a promising list of vacancies from the classified ads in the Post.

Early in the day I'd find swarms of people waving the paper, but none of us was lucky enough to get an apartment. It was hard, discouraging work. Finally at the office, Paul heard of the availability of a small apartment in Arna Valley in Arlington, provided we would buy the furniture. The furniture was wartime issue: two blue upholstered pieces, a sofa and a chair, no springs, but comfortable enough for young people! The tables, two lamps and one coffee, in the living room had been well cared for. The chest of drawers, bed, and night tables in the bedroom were adequate. We wanted it! And as soon as we sold our blue 1937 two-door Chevrolet for the money to buy the furniture, we moved in.

In between the long hours that Paul worked and that we spent in helping Jean welcome the Minton twins, we had an occasional opportunity for recreation. We saw many of the Washington, D.C., attractions, the National Gallery of Art, the Washington Monument (we stomped the steps!), the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials, the Smithsonian, but thoughtfully reserved some for showing off to visitors. We left Washington before we exhausted our list. As a consequence, we still haven't seen the capitol building, although we recently did tour the White House. However, our favorite pastime was seeing the Washington Senators play ball in old Griffith Stadium.

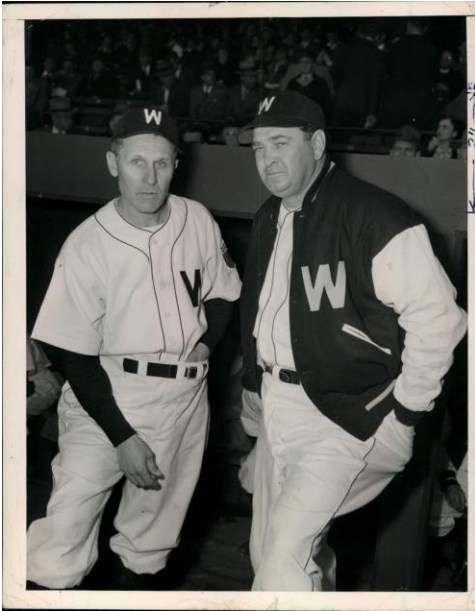
I had become acquainted with baseball and learned to like it in Portland. In Washington, in the Big Leagues, I found the level of play much more exciting than the games in the Triple A Pacific League. During our time in Portland, I'd found out that the majors were composed of the American and National Leagues, but I never figured out which teams were in which league. In D.C. I finally learned that the Senators, sometimes called the *Nationals* for obvious reasons, were nevertheless in the *American* League. As we attended games at Griffith Stadium, I became fascinated with the names and personalities of the famous baseball players we saw. While we were there the Senators were never good enough to reach the World Series, so all the teams I saw were in the American League, too. That knowledge proved a great advantage years later when our sons became baseball fans.

I was fascinated with the post-war players I saw who were playing ball then. Clark Griffith's Washington Senators were never in the pennant hunt, and hometown stars were always a little over the hill, like center fielder George Case, who won the major league base-stealing title five years in a row, or Mickey Vernon, a hard-hitting first baseman, one of my favorites, or Sherry Robertson, a journeyman infielder, Mr. Griffith's son-in-law. However, most of my favorites played on the rival teams which came to Griffith Stadium. They had names that still ring clear as heroes in the game. Most of the famous ones were long time favorites of Paul, who had been following baseball years before we met. It was fun to share his enthusiasm for them, but I had some special favorites of my own. Joe DiMaggio, of course, was everyone's favorite. Today I recall the thrill of seeing him in person every time a pre-game TV show plays old clips of his hitting a long ball and striding around the bases with his long legs or running down someone else's long hit into the outfield. His brother Dom, who played for the Boston Red Sox, was another. I thought him as exciting a player as Joe even though his reputation never reached the peaks of Joe's.



Bob Feller, the great young pitcher for the Cleveland Indians, was easily my favorite pitcher. I liked him for more than his main claim to fame. He had the reputation of being the hardest throwing pitcher of all time, and we had the privilege of watching a very early attempt at proving that assertion. On a well heralded day, the Senators had a big promotion of a machine that they set up to measure the velocity of Feller's pitches. By today's standard it was a crude affair and could not be used when Feller was actually pitching to a batter. It consisted of a cube formed by two by four pieces of wood. When the pitched ball went through the cube, it broke two beams of light which enabled the operator to figure the speed of the ball. After Feller's pitches were measured at ninety-five to one hundred miles an hour, the officials allowed a Washington Senator pitcher, Bobo Newsom, to throw at the machine. The stadium fans, mesmerized by Feller's pitches, were bemused that Newsom would challenge Feller, for he was not known for

his fast ball but rather for off-speed pitches and an occasional "eephus" ball that he could lob high into the air, sometimes for un-hittable strikes. On this occasion, he went through a mighty windup . . . and threw his eephus ball! His raucous laughter as he stamped back to the dugout was matched by that of the fans.



Ossie Bluege and Bobo Newsom, 1947

Baseball became an important sport to me, and I was somewhat disappointed when we left Washington to return to school at SMU in Dallas, where we could no longer see major league baseball or very much baseball at all. But we quickly became involved in our school work and neglected the sport for several years.

Later, both George and Roland became deeply interested in baseball, playing on Little League teams, watching the few major league games shown on television, and beginning their long hobby of collecting baseball cards. The boys, sometimes bothered by the macho bias of the time, seemed to be proud that their mother at least knew the difference in the Leagues, as well as the names of the teams in each League, even if she wasn't always aware of some of the finer points of the game. Whenever we took a vacation to cities which had major league teams, we always planned those trips around the games. Thus, I began to see National League teams as well as American League teams. We never managed to be in New York when the Yankees were in town, and the Yankees were Roland's favorite team. However, one time we were all excited about being in New York at the time of the All-Star Game in Shea Stadium and were able to get tickets for the game weeks before we left Dallas. That game was an experience: our seats, which we reached by what seemed to be a ladder instead of stairs, were in the farthest reach of left field affording us a tiny bird's eye view of the participants, but it was still an exciting experience.

Roland finally got to see the Yankees a few years ago when he and his family were in New York at the right time. I don't believe George has seen them yet, but he recently did get to ride in the elevator with Yogi Berra in Boston and talk to him. We added the Baseball Hall of Fame to our itinerary on one trip. But the games were the most fun. We saw both Chicago teams play when we were in Chicago, the Cardinals in Saint Louis, the Astros in Houston, the then Braves after they moved from Boston to Milwaukee and before they arrived in Atlanta, and finally the Texas Rangers after the Senators left Washington. All this time I was feeling pretty smug about my baseball knowledge. Then my baseball know-how came crashing down around my ears: expansion set in over a period of years when I wasn't paying attention. First the Dodgers left Brooklyn, the Giants left New York, the Browns left Saint Louis, and seemingly dozens of new teams started up on the West Coast and points in between, even in Canada. Who could keep up with all that change? At least the Orioles stay in Baltimore, and I assumed that they must be in the National League because I'd never seen them in person, only on TV. That assumption turned out to be rash, for I now discover that, when we were there, the Baltimore Orioles were in the minors, in the International League, and so they never played Washington. When the Orioles were added to the roster of the major leagues, they were put in the American League!

Washington Senators, where are you now that I need you?