

# FROM OUR FRIENDS

## Past Time

IT WAS A POIGNANT MOMENT IN our remodel and the decision was not to be taken lightly. We'd already come a long way with our disheveled little bungalow in the proceeding months—gutting, restoring, hunting down just the right fixtures—with many decisions weighed and made, but this one hanging over us now was a real doozy. We had to pick something for our time capsule.

Earlier, it had become obvious that the hollow space inside one of the newly built porch columns would make for a perfect cache to seal something away for a few lifetimes. And now, Andy, our contractor, was getting ready to finish up the installation. Having left the decision to the last minute, Beth and I needed to act fast.

We knew we wanted something more meaningful than a page of the daily newspaper or an arbitrary trinket to represent us. We wanted something that related to the 1926 house, and to our era (10 years and growing) under its roof. And it had to be something with a thread to the community—a treasure that would ring true with its someday discoverers.

I paced from room to room at the house we were renting, sifting through our possessions, but nothing grabbed me. Then I came into the back hall and was immediately drawn to something. Hanging on a hook, stitched with the insignia of our city's baseball team, was a black baseball cap. Something clicked. Beth and I agreed that the hat had a new destiny.

So with a Sharpie I inked our names and the date on the underside of the bill and crammed it into the column. It wasn't until later that I was able to put my finger on what exactly guided that choice, something intangible at the time, a connection between baseball, our city, our bungalow, and us.

Our local team, the Bend Elks, plays in a Northwest summer league made up of college players, guys with big-league ambitions trying to get in as much game time as possible. Their name pays tribute to a long-ago chapter of local baseball, when a timber mill—an industry that put our town on the map—created a company team to take on other mills. And every summer, Beth and I attend a handful of their home games, paying a few bucks for tickets and making a date night of beer, Polish sausages and stomping our feet on the aluminum bleachers.

A similar baseball fever sweeps through towns and cities across the country. Fans don the team colors, stand for the national anthem and then get down to the business of yelling for a hit and booing bad calls. If nothing else binds a community together, then cheering on the home



THE 1917 BEND ELKS, BYRON A. "DUTCH" STOVER, CAPTAIN.

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team does. It's been that way for over a century.

In fact, bungalows and baseball both hit their stride at about the same time: bungalows in 1901, when Stickley began publishing *The Craftsman*, and baseball two years later, with the creation of the first "World Series" in 1903. Baseball, by then, was being referred to as the national pastime; bungalows would quickly emerge as the nation's

"everyman" house. Both came to represent a hearty slice of Americana, rich in history.

Stepping into an old Craftsman on worn floors, or entering the stands above a freshly mowed diamond, there's an immediate sense that you're part of something that spans generations. It's a transcendence of the here and now, a trip to a simpler time.

My dad insists that listening to his beloved Red Sox on the radio—something he does each summer from my parents' cabin in Maine, where TV is officially banned—is better than watching the game on the tube. He grew up that way and now enjoys tapping into a deep well of summer nostalgia. Somehow it overcomes any need to see a diving catch or a close tag at home. Mom says he's even been known to act out plate appearances with an imaginary bat, working the count or taking big cuts in the living room to entertain houseguests (and himself).

Baseball has that strong familial aspect, reminding us of our fathers and grandfathers, of playing catch in the yard, of where we're from. And certainly, old homes, like bungalows, are woven into our memories in a similar way. They're more than just houses, after all—more like members of the family.

These days, living in an era of need-it-now trends, where technology has a knack for chipping away at values, there's something comforting about creaky old homes with porch swings and games that take three or four hours to finish, one hurled pitch at a time. Steroids and outlandish player salaries do blight the game of baseball, and knock-off bungalow homes may be rampantly fashioned in the "style," but the ideals of both are as fixed as our history.

Anyway, I forget about all of that as Beth and I sit back in the bleachers on a cool summer's night, cracking peanut shells and waiting for a batter to rip into a pitch. Maybe after the next inning I'll go buy her a new hat. I owe her one.

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*Freelance writer Mark R. Johnson grew up in a Boston-area foursquare. In grade school, thanks to an understanding principal, he was awarded special dispensation as the only student permitted to wear his baseball hat in class.*