

ROY SIEVERS EULOGY

Good Morning. My name is Paul Scimonelli and I am Roy's biographer. I would first like to thank Bill, Shawn, Rob and the rest of the Sievers family for giving me this wonderful honor: speaking about Roy today.

In 1959, had you told this pudgy, uncoordinated, ten-year-old C.Y.O Little League catcher that he would one day be asked to speak about his idol, his hero, Roy Seivers, he would had said you were out of your mind!

But here I am, and I will do the best I can.

In 1957, Roy had his Hall of Fame year with the Washington Senators, hitting 42 home runs and 114 RBI. 1958 was nearly a carbon copy of the previous season, with Roy hitting 39 round trippers and 108 RBI. My feeble little 3rd grade mind began to awake to the buzz in which the city was ablaze.

But in 1959, the Senators brought something to the DC area that had been missing for a long time:

Hope. Real Hope.

“The Fearsome Foursome” of our own Roy Sievers, Jim Lemon, Bobby Allison and Harmon Killebrew were sending “moon shots” out of all of the American League stadiums. They were also dubbed the new “SALK Vaccine”: Sievers, Allison, Lemon and Killebrew. The “shot in the arm” the Senators needed! However, despite the combined 136 home runs hit by the Foursome, the Senators kept a stranglehold on last place that year, but we didn't care.

Mt. Calvary Parochial School had let out in June, and my brother Glenn and I were left with long days of playing with all the neighbor kids, and the inevitable early evening baseball games that would stretch on well past the time the street lights went on. After supper, it was a little TV and then off to bed, where we would fall asleep to the dulcet sounds of Chuck Thompson and Bob Wolff calling the Senators' play by play on WWDC radio. Being good Catholic boys, our bedtime prayers always included the Senators.

Although we relished the time away from school, the long summer months would give way to boredom, so what do you do when it's either too hot or too wet to go out and play? Let's call up Roy Sievers!

Well, sure! We'd seen mom and dad use the phone, how hard could it be? Roy plays for the Senators, right? So he must live in DC! Let's get the White Pages and look him up!

With trembling fingers and trepidatious hearts we ran down the list of "Sievers" to find only one "Sievers, R." in the book. It must be him, we concluded.

Dialing carefully, we heard the phone ringing on the other end, a soft click, and then...

The feeble sound of a very sweet old lady saying "Hello?"

Pillared with fear. What do we do?

"Hello?" she questioned again.

We did and said nothing.

"Hello." This time with a little more consternation in her voice.

This can't be our hero Roy Sievers with that feeble little voice! **WRONG NUMBER! HANG UP!**

Without a word we sheepishly put the phone back in the cradle and ran pell-mell out of the room. We had been told not to play with the phone. It was important that we keep it open in case our dad got a call from the U. S. Navy Band office, where he served as trumpet and post horn soloist and later as section chief.

But we weren't playing. We sincerely wanted to call our hero Roy.

Several days went by. A strong summer rain was pelting the metro area, showing no signs of letting up. We knew the game would be canceled that night. So obviously, Roy would be home, right?

Surreptitiously meandering downstairs to our father's study, we once again looked up the number and re-dialed.

"Hello?" Again, the nice, feeble little voice.

Again, we said nothing.

"Hello!" This time with more fervor.

Not a word from us.

“I don’t know who this is,” she exhorted, “but if you call again, I’m calling the operator and the police!”

That was it. Down went the phone, out we dashed, back upstairs to our room, vowing never again to place a call to our hero. Forever to remain a mythic figure, Sievers, R. was not to be called again.

But then, there was always Picture Day at Griffith Stadium.

Picture Day at most of today’s stadiums is a sterile thing. Masses of people go out to the left field stands and snap pictures as the players stand behind a red velvet rope on a red velvet carpet. No joke! It’s like Project Runway! There is no “up close and personal” anymore.

Picture Day at Griffith Stadium in 1959 was the polar opposite. Kids walked down to the gate by the dugout and waited to be escorted to the on-deck circle, where they could stand with whomever was there at the time. Imagine, if you will, an ant standing next to Adonis, Hercules, Agamemnon. That was me, standing next to Jim Lemon and our own Roy. Gargantuan! I was in total awe!

That was the day I met my hero.

My father took the picture and I waited for weeks to get the photo back. I’m sure you remember those little 3 by 3 square photos with the crinkle cut edges? I kept them in my desk for ages until there were, like my baseball cards, thrown out by my ever-cleaning mother.

But those emotions I felt that day could never be tossed away.

Thomas Boswell, the Dean of the DC Baseball writers, wrote an appreciation of Roy in his book “Cult Baseball Players: The Greats, the Flakes, the Weird and the Wonderful.” Please allow me a brief quotation:

“A baseball hero is a toy of childhood. Electric trains, cowboy guns and plastic soldiers are the same find. But with a baseball hero, a youngster reaches out, for one of the first times, into the world outside his family. That connection with its big, mysterious environment gives a certain sense of power; children discover they can invest their affections and actually get something special in return. However, hero worship brings with it the first morsels of the sort of pain and fear that we associate with the word “reality.” We begin to learn about adult disappointment and the profound uncontrollability of nature.”

And the Senators gave us a LOT of disappointment!

I will of course agree with Mr. Boswell's statement, but I prefer to think on those new found emotions as a means of transference. Please allow my explanation.

Over the past year, I have been attending various baseball meetings. I would set up a small table and hawk pre-orders for my book. Invariably, to everyone with whom I spoke, when I would mention that I was writing the biography of Roy Sievers, their eyes would grow big with memories and they would say things like, "Roy Sievers! He was my hero and my favorite player growing up!" Or, "Roy was my first baseball autograph." Or, "The first game my dad ever took me to, in Griffith Stadium, Roy hit a homer!" And for that brief moment when they were speaking with me, they would no longer be William or Robert or Hugh; they would be Billy, Bobby, or Skip. They were kids again.

It was these kinds of statements that initially led me to write this book. As a musician, I hear things differently. I listen for the nuance of the spoken word. And in all these statements, I always heard a cadence of nostalgia mixed with reverence. However, in all these statements, there also lay an unsung longing: "My dad took me to the stadium," "my first autograph at the ball park," "he was so nice and kind to all the kids," "Dad taught me how to keep score."

Baseball was that unspoken bond between father and son. What father really knew how to talk to a fourth grader? But for that day at the ball park, for a few hours, your distant, distracted father became your "dad." As Woody Allen so eloquently put it, "80 percent of life is just showing up." Your dad took the time to pack you and maybe a friend into the car and travel to your hometown stadium, snap your picture at the park, buy you the soda and hot dog, root for your hero to hit a homer, maybe keep score together. It was during that time that we transferred our hero worship from player to father. In our nascent emotional journey, both were larger than life.

And secretly, as we grew older, married, and had children of our own, he hoped our children would make that same transference with us.

For the past three years, it has been my distinct pleasure to be Roy's biographer. I flew into St. Louis on many occasions to meet with Roy, Shawn and Rob, talking about his life, their lives, Joan, baseball, traveling, and so much more. I told them I didn't want his biography to be just a dry recitation of baseball statistics. I wanted to know Roy about the person.

And I did.

For the first time, I got to know my hero as “just one of the guys.” We talked about everything; the weather, his aching joints, how he loved his Cadillac, how he missed playing golf like he used to, wasting his money on the penny slots, how he missed the game, and how he loved his grandkids.

I interviewed many of his friends, teammates and coaches: Whitey Herzog, Brooks Robinson, Bobby Shantz, Herb Plews, Albie Pearson, Dick Hyde, Don Larsen, just to name a few. All of them. *Every Single One of Them* praised Roy for his kindness, his humility, his mentoring of younger players, his fierce competitive spirit, and always his picture perfect swing.

He was a true baseball man, a “full ball player” as described by Bob Wolff.

But he was also so much more to many of us of a certain age.

I realized as I was writing this testimonial that this was truly the end of the dream for me and for so many other “kids” my age. Roy was that last, secret vestige of our own dreams, the dream that WE could be a “somebody,” that we could be that major leaguer, or an astronaut (it was the 50’s after all!) or a doctor, or a painter, or a rock star, or ,or, or, or.... the dream would change hourly sometimes. But Roy was the reason we allowed ourselves to dream. His hometown heroics, his autograph kindness, his sincerity, made us feel we could be “that” someday.

As I told Shawn on that sad Tuesday in April, when she told me that Roy had passed, I felt like I had lost my dad all over again. The sorrow was that real. My dad passed when he was only 78, which is 21 years ago now. And in meeting and talking and kibitzing with Roy, I sort of re-transferred a lot of those feeling for my dad back to Roy. It’s because of him I dared to dream. It’s because of my Father, I am the musician I am today. I couldn’t swing a bat, but I sure could swing on the bass!

Thank you for allowing me to say these kind words, but I cannot leave you on such a melancholy note. Please allow me to tell one of my all-time favorite Roy Sievers stories, a glimpse of the real “Squirrel” if you will:

In the mid-1990’s, after nearly 3 decades of being a free-lance musician, and with a new daughter born in 1991, I decided I need steady, gainful employment.

Through my connection in the DC area, I convinced the Director of the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society of Washington DC to hire me as an events coordinator. I developed, produced and promoted sports related card and autograph shows. In 1995, we held a huge testimonial benefit dinner and show to honor Tommy Lasorda as our chapters "Man of the Year." I called on Roy, along with Frank Howard, Ed Yost, Mickey Vernon, Jim Lemon, and several players from the original Brooklyn Dodgers to be autograph guests and help us raise money.

Quick side trip:

During the 1980's and '90's I was a performing musician with my own band called "Street Life." Believe it or not, there was a time long ago when I was buff, handsome, good looking, and extremely charismatic.

Not that which you see before you now!

The band seemed to attract a large contingent of lovely ladies who would follow us from lounge to lounge. It was from this bevy of beauties that I recruited a few hostesses, charged with the task of escorting the ball players from the lobby to the dinner table of the event. I assigned one very attractive young woman, Cindy Kmetz, as Roy's escort.

All of the ladies, myself, and all of the players were waiting out in the anteroom of the dining room to be introduced. While waiting there, Roy casually looked over to Cindy and said, "Boy, you've got stormy legs!"

Confused, Cindy replied "what do you mean, stormy legs?"

And Roy said, "Yah, you've got stormy legs: I'd like to see them clear up!"

That's the Roy I want to remember!

Let us not be sad that he is gone: let us be happy he was here.

Thank you