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Foreword

Lee K. Abbott

Following a game, a storybook little old lady confronts Jon Kruk, then the first baseman for the Phillies, outside the stadium. He's smoking a cigarette.

"Shame on you," she scolds. "You're an athlete. You shouldn't be smoking!"

"Ma'am," the notoriously impolitic Kruk begins, "I ain't an athlete. I'm a ballplayer."

A confession: for almost two decades I hated baseball (well, not exactly *hated*, more like *couldn't care less*). The game—in the Bigs, at least—was virtually unrecognizable to me, what with the “errors” that are astronomical salaries, cookie-cutter stadiums, and free agency. Take, for example, the designated hitter rule: it is, frankly, a sin, venial at a minimum. If you're a ballplayer, friends, then pick up the lumber and go to work with the rest of the fellows in sanitariums. And while you're at it, take George Steinbrenner, the Daddy Warbucks of the sport. How the devil are my Cleveland Indians going to compete against a swashbuckler who's got the keys to Fort Knox? And, please, don't get me started on steroids, HGH, AstroTurf, indoor baseball, night games, or the ameliorating properties of flaxseed oil.

Indeed, for those two decades, baseball was either boring or plain exasperating. The same teams won. The rich got richer, the poor got old. Owners blackmailed cities for “better” stadiums and tax deals and lease arrangements and zoning and whatever else greased the wheel on the Bentley. Players became loyal only to their wallets. Strikes and lockouts; lockouts and strikes. Fans paid through the keister for seats and eats, never mind the party favors that pass for souvenirs nowadays. Parking was

always in another area code. You couldn't smoke, throw a beverage or two, bang the chairs to "Let's go, RiCo!" or pull off your shirt and write anything more offensive than "Marry me, Sweet Cheeks" in Marksalot between your nipples. tv broadcasts turned into endless, ear-splitting beer commercials interrupted every seven minutes by a pitch or two. Lordy, the umpires got in shape (remember Augie Donatelli?). Girls—comely, lithe, and too damn wholesome for a game that used to have so much spit in it—took up residence on the foul lines. "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" gave way to "We Are the Champions." The season grew longer—snowfall to snowfall almost. Playoffs expanded. Roseanne Barr butchered the National Anthem (attention, would-be singers: if you're not Rocco Scotti, don't bother). The poobahs from the league's politburo banned Charlie Hustle for, golly, gambling. Mascots became the spawn of Satan. And what's with the Spandex that now passes for a uniform? And put down that stovepipe, Bunky, bats are made of wood, period. And, please, ixnay on T-ball. You're supposed to hit the danged thing in motion, for crying out loud.

Maybe, for the decades in question, I was just grumpy, my own days on the diamond long behind me. I'd played Little League, American Legion, AAU, Pony League—a centerfielder with great speed, great glove, and enough prowess at the plate to impress the current girlfriend; after college, I took up the delights unique to fast-pitch softball—still in center field, still looking over my shoulder for the video camera; a few years into my first job as an assistant professor at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, I joined the slow-pitch leagues of the Jewish Community Center (gentiles welcome!) in the eastern suburbs—yeah, again in the outfield but with an attenuated attention span. And then, one dark day in Mudville, I was not playing any form of ball anymore. Worse yet, the Indians couldn't beat a drum, much less a club of grown-ups. Joe Charboneau, our one-season wonder, had disappeared into a bar in Buffalo. And, sadly, yours truly was on his way to Columbus to reckon with the nearly professional sports offered by Ohio State University. I had become John Wayne without a desperado to shoot, Gertrude without Heathcliff, Hekyll without Jekyll—just a guy (think: Nixon, semi-blotto), wandering around talking to the walls and weeping at the sight

of his Caesar Cedeno memorabilia (baseball cards and bat: when I have a hero to worship, I worship the dickens out of him [or her: see the pine cone stolen from Emily Dickinson's house; see the pillowcase snatched from the clothesline of Eudora Welty]).

But in the last two years, your humble author has found religion afresh, or the nine-inning version of transcendence. I have, in a phrase, been born again, now as obnoxious a nut on the subject as Rummy is on the subject of the army we "don't" have. I owe my newfound faith to two developments: the publication of *Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game* by Michael Lewis in 2003; and the triumph of the Red Sox over the Moloch of Manhattan, the New York Yankees. Both, in brief, have given me belief that the next time mighty Casey hunkers at the plate, he may whack the potato into the cheap seats above the sign for Ford trucks.

The book is two things, really—a biography/profile of Billy Beane, the scrappy general manager of the Oakland Athletics, and a recipe for success in baseball courtesy of sabermetrics, the analysis of the numbers the game itself produces, from the base on balls to the sacrifice bunt, from the stolen base to hitting into the double play. In effect, the book addresses the following question: How can a team with the second lowest payroll in the game challenge for the world championship? The answer is as surprising as it is daring: you find and field a team composed of players that, gulp, nobody else wants—players, it turns out, who produce the sort of numbers no one in old-time management has the patience or the interest to evaluate: the lard butts and putative slug-a-beds, those with supposedly rubber arms and wandering eyes, the coolie toiling well out of the limelight. What, for example, is the value of a player who just doesn't strike out? How do you capitalize on a player who walks? The book is a doozy of a read, stylish and startling, a story of numbers and people that is as compelling a yarn as the first time David sent chin music upside the head of Goliath.

The Red Sox victory, of course, needs no further description. A four-game sweep of the Bronx Bombers was as sweet an angel full of pie. Sure, as I write, the team as we knew it is already busting apart: Pedro "Who's Your Daddy?" Martinez has, alas, gone over to the dark side; Schilling may start next season on the IR; money's tight, the salary cap

even tighter. Still, what remains, for the fan, is hope. If the BoSox can do it, maybe my Tribe can. Or any other roster full of folks, like writers themselves, brave enough to believe that cleverness and anonymity can trump washboard abs and gargantuan payrolls. Indeed, I think writers, innocent-minded and always eager for a happy ending (like Jon Kruk, yes?), have been drawn to baseball because it is most like the work they do between the foul lines that are their margins—timeless and ritualistic, unpredictable and balanced, deliberate and heartening, disappointing and impossible.

Contributors

Lee K. Abbott is the author of six collections of stories, most recently *Wet Places at Noon*. His new book, *All Things, All at Once: New & Selected Stories*, is forthcoming from W. W. Norton in 2006. He teaches at The Ohio State University in Columbus.

Jocelyn Bartkevicius teaches creative writing at the University of Central Florida. Her work has appeared in anthologies and such journals as *Hudson Review*, *Missouri Review*, *Fourth Genre*, *Iowa Woman*, *Gulf Coast*, and *Bellingham Review*. Bartkevicius's essays have received *Iowa Woman* and *Missouri Review* awards as well as the Annie Dillard Award and citations in *The Best American Essays*. She is completing a memoir, *The Emerald Room*.

Rick Bass is the author of eighteen books of fiction and nonfiction, including, most recently, *The Hermit's Story* (2003), a collection of fiction, and *The Roadless Yaak* (2002), an anthology of nonfiction about the last roadless areas of northwestern Montana's Yaak Valley, where there is still not a single acre of designated wilderness. He lives in Montana with his wife and daughters.

Larry Blakely lives in Portland, Oregon, and teaches at Clark College. He's published over a dozen baseball stories in a variety of literary magazines and is the author of a collection of stories, *Dust and Dreams* (Bear Creek Press, 2006). Although he's over fifty, he still keeps his glove oiled, just in case.

Earl S. Braggs is UC Foundation Professor of English at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. His collections of poetry include *In Which*

Language Do I Keep Silent (Anhinga Press, 2006), *Crossing Tecumseh Street* (Anhinga Press, 2003), *House on Fontanka* (Anhinga Press, 2000), *Walking Back from Woodstock* (Anhinga Press, 1997), *Hat Dancer Blue* (Anhinga Press, 1993), and a chapbook, *Hats* (Linprint Press, 1989). His novel in progress won the Jack Kerouac Literary Prize. He is a recent winner of a Tennessee Arts Commission Individual Artist fellowship and a Chattanooga Allied Arts grant.

Christopher Buckley is the author of fourteen books of poetry, most recently *And the Sea* (Sheep Meadow Press, 2006). Among his awards are two NEA grants in poetry (1984 and 2001) and a Fulbright Award in Creative Writing to the former Yugoslavia. He has published two books of creative nonfiction, *Cruising State* (1994) and *Sleep Walk* (Eastern Washington University Press, 2006). He teaches in the Creative Writing Department at the University of California–Riverside.

Rick Campbell's most recent book is *The Traveler's Companion* (Black Bay Books, 2004). His first full-length book, *Setting the World in Order* (Texas Tech, 2001), won the Walt McDonald Prize. His poems and essays have appeared in *Georgia Review*, *Missouri Review*, *Tampa Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Puerto Del Sol*, *Prairie Schooner*, and other journals. Campbell has won an NEA Fellowship, a Pushcart Prize, and two fellowships from the Florida Arts Council. He is the director of Anhinga Press and the Anhinga Prize for Poetry, and he teaches English at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee. He lives with his wife and daughter in Gadsden County, Florida.

David Carkeet has written several novels, among them *The Greatest Slump of All Time* (Harper and Row, 1984). His memoir, *Campus Sexpot* (University of Georgia Press, 2005), won the Creative Nonfiction Award given by the Association of Writers and Writing Programs. For many years he taught linguistics and writing at the University of Missouri–St. Louis. He lives in Vermont.

Ron Carlson's most recent book is his selected stories, *A Kind of Flying*

(W. W. Norton, 2003). His novel *Five Skies* will be published by Viking in 2007. He is a professor of English and the director of the Graduate Program in Fiction at the University of California–Irvine.

Michael Chabon is the celebrated, prize-winning author of stories and novels, some of which refer to a deceased Pittsburgh Pirates catcher by the name of Eli Drinkwater.

Mick Cochrane is the author of two novels, *Flesh Wounds* (Nan Talese/Doubleday, 1997) and *Sport* (St. Martin's Press, 2001). His work has appeared in *Minnesota Monthly*, *Northwest Review*, *Kansas Quarterly*, and *Cincinnati Review*. He is a professor of English and writer-in-residence at Canisius College in Buffalo, New York.

Hal Crowther is a critic, essayist, and syndicated columnist who lives in Hillsborough, North Carolina. “Dealer’s Choice,” his column on Southern letters and manners, has appeared in the *Oxford American* since 1994. His fourth collection of essays, *Gather at the River: Notes on the Post-Millennial South* (Louisiana State University Press, 2006), was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle prize for criticism. His previous collection, *Cathedrals of Kudzu: A Personal Landscape of the South* (Louisiana State University Press, 2000), won the Lillian Smith Book Award, the Fellowship Prize for Non-Fiction from the Fellowship of Southern Writers, and the Book of the Year prize for essays from *Foreword Magazine*. For his first book, *Unarmed But Dangerous* (Longstreet, 1995), Crowther was cited by Kirkpatrick Sale as “the best essayist working in American journalism today.” A former newsmagazine editor, screenwriter, and film and drama critic, he won the *Baltimore Sun*’s H. L. Mencken Writing Award in 1992, the American Association of Newsweeklies’ first prize for commentary in 1998, and a career prize, the Russell J. Jandoli Award for Excellence, in 2001. A work in progress, “Babe in the Woods,” is a book-length essay on innocence. His wife is the novelist Lee Smith.

Philip F. Deaver attended his first professional baseball game when he

was eleven, in the company of his father. It was the Cardinals versus the Pirates, summer of 1957. Wally Moon was the Cardinals' left fielder, Al Dark was at short, Eddie Kasko was at third. Back in the day, Deaver played shortstop and third, though in his one summer at Culver Military Academy he played catcher. In all his baseball days he was never allowed to pitch. This doesn't still bother him. Deaver is the thirteenth winner of the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction for the book *Silent Retreats* (University of Georgia Press, 1988). His most recent book is a collection of poetry, *How Men Pray* (Anhinga Press, 2005).

Andre Dubus was one of our best short story writers. After the accident that crippled him, he became one of our best memoirists. Although he did write one novel, *The Lieutenant* (1967), Dubus was dedicated to the short story and novella genres and published most of his work in small but distinguished literary journals such as *Ploughshares* and *Sewanee Review*. His last collections were *Dancing after Hours* (1996) and *Meditations from a Movable Chair* (1998). His writing awards include the PEN/Malamud, the Rea Award for Excellence in Short Fiction, and the Jean Stein Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He received fellowships from the Guggenheim and MacArthur foundations, and several writing awards are named after him.

Leslie Epstein was born in Los Angeles to a family of filmmakers. Not surprisingly, films have made up a good part of the subject matter of his fiction. He has published nine books of fiction, most recently *San Remo Drive* (2003). His best-known novel, *King of the Jews* (1979), has become a classic of Holocaust literature. In addition to a Rhodes Scholarship, Epstein has received many fellowships and awards, including a Fulbright grant, a Guggenheim fellowship, an award for Distinction in Literature from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, a residency at the Rockefeller Institute at Bellagio, and grants from the Ingram Merrill Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. He has been the director of the Creative Writing Program at Boston University for more than twenty years. His newest novel, *The Eighth Wonder of the World*, will be released in fall 2006.

Gary Forrester, who with his family recently relocated to New Zealand, played center field for the Williamstown Wolves, a baseball club established in 1896 in the Australian state of Victoria. His first novel, *Houseboating in the Ozarks*, was published by Dufour Editions (2006); among other things, it recounts the St. Louis Cardinals' bittersweet season of 2003. The piece included here, "Begotten, Not Made," is an excerpt from his second novel of the same title. In the 1990s Forrester composed and performed the music on three bluegrass albums under the nom-de-guitar Eddie Rambeaux.

Lee Gutkind is founder and editor of the popular journal *Creative Nonfiction*, the first and largest literary journal to publish nonfiction exclusively, and the author of a dozen books of fiction and nonfiction. Gutkind's memoir, *Forever Fat: Essays by the Godfather* (University of Nebraska Press, 2003), was partially inspired by an article by James Wolcott in *Vanity Fair* which pinpointed Gutkind as the "godfather behind creative nonfiction." His upcoming book, *Almost Human: Making Robots Think*, will be published by W. W. Norton in 2007.

Jeffrey Hammond, the George B. and Willma Reeves Distinguished Professor in the Liberal Arts at St. Mary's College of Maryland, teaches English and American literature, classical and biblical literature, and nonfiction writing. His creative nonfiction has won a Pushcart Prize, *Shenandoah's* Carter Prize for Essay, and the *Missouri Review* Editors' Prize. His most recent books include *The American Puritan Elogy: A Literary and Cultural Study* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); and *Ohio States: A Twentieth-Century Midwestern* (Kent State University Press, 2002), which was a finalist for an Independent Publisher Book Award in the essays/creative nonfiction category.

Jeffrey Higa grew up an air force brat; he was always starting over in new schools, new neighborhoods, new teams. He thought that when he grew up he would settle in one place and live there the rest of his life. When wanderlust hits you early, however, it leaves a permanent mark. He has spent the majority of his life roaming around the country, stop-

ping at several writing programs before he graduated with a master's degree from the University of Missouri–St. Louis. Since then he has published humor and fiction in *Honolulu*, *Bamboo Ridge*, *Zyzyva*, and *Sonora Review*, and won the 2003 *Kumu Kahua* Playwriting Contest. He currently lives in Honolulu with his wife and daughter.

Peter Ives directs the Writing Center at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, and was a creative writing teacher at Trinity Preparatory School. His work has appeared in a number of anthologies and literary journals, including *Gettysburg Review*, *Laurel Review*, *Florida Review*, and *Fourth Genre*. He is completing a collection of essays.

Richard Jackson is the author of nine books of poetry, most recently *Heartwall* (winner of the University of Massachusetts Juniper Prize, 2000) and *Unauthorized Autobiography: New and Selected Poems* (Ashland, 2003). The editor of two journals, two anthologies, and a couple dozen chapbooks of translations, Jackson is the winner of Guggenheim, NEA, NEH, and Witter Bynner fellowships as well as the author of five Pushcart selections. He was a Fulbright Exchange Poet to the former Yugoslavia and is the author of two prize-winning critical books. His poems have been translated into a dozen languages. Jackson teaches at the University of Tennessee–Chattanooga, where he directs the Meacham Writers' Conference, and at Vermont College, where he coordinates the Slovene residency; he has won teaching awards at both schools.

William Least Heat-Moon was born of English-Irish-Osage ancestry in Kansas City, Missouri. He holds a doctorate in English and a bachelor's degree in photojournalism from the University of Missouri. In addition to his breakthrough book *Blue Highways*, he is also the author of *PrairyErth* (Houghton Mifflin, 1991) and *River-Horse* (Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

Lee Martin is the author of two novels, *The Bright Forever* (Shaye Areheart Books, 2005), a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction, and *Quakertown* (Dutton, 2001); two memoirs, *Turning Bones* (University of

Nebraska Press, 2003) and *From Our House* (Dutton, 2000); and a story collection, *The Least You Need to Know* (Sarabande, 1996). His stories and essays have appeared in places such as *Harper's*, *Georgia Review*, *Creative Nonfiction*, *Fourth Genre*, *River Teeth*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Kenyon Review*, and *Southern Review*. Martin has won fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Ohio Arts Council. He directs the Creative Writing Program at The Ohio State University.

Michael Martone's new book, *Michael Martone*, a memoir in contributor's notes, was published by FC2 in 2005. *Unconventions*, a collection of essays on writing, also appeared in 2005, published by the University of Georgia Press.

Cris Mazza is the author of a dozen novels and collections of fiction. Her most recent books are the novels *Disability* (FC2, 2005) and *Homeland* (Red Hen Press, 2004), and a memoir titled *Indigenous: Growing Up Californian* (City Lights, 2003). Among her other notable titles are *Dog People* (Coffee House Press, 1995 and 1997) and *Your Name Here:___* (Coffee House Press, 1997), plus the critically acclaimed *Is It Sexual Harassment Yet?* (FC2, 1992). She was coeditor of *Chick-Lit: Postfeminist Fiction* (FC2, 1995), *Chick-Lit 2 (No Chick Vics)* (FC2, 1996), and other anthologies of women's fiction, and was a recipient of an NEA fellowship. In spring 1996 Mazza was the cover feature in *Poets & Writers Magazine*, and in December 2004 *Poets & Writers* published her essay "Chick-Lit and the Perversion of a Genre."

Kyle Minor was born in West Palm Beach, Florida, and lives in Columbus, Ohio. His work has appeared widely in literary magazines including *Quarterly West*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *River Teeth*, *Antioch Review*, and *Mid American Review*. Minor's stories and essays have won several literary awards, most recently from *Atlantic Monthly*. He is a regular book reviewer for the *Columbus Dispatch* and editor of the *Frostproof Review*. He teaches fiction writing and composition at The Ohio State University.

Dan O'Neill was born January 31, 1953. He was named by dedicated St.

Louis Browns fan Larry O'Neill after former Browns manager Daniel Phillip Howley (1927–29). Having graduated with a bachelor of journalism in 1981, O'Neill initially worked as sports editor of the *Tri-County Journal* in Pacific, Missouri, where he wrote, photographed, designed, pasted, and prayed over a weekly sports section. O'Neill was hired by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in February 1985 after a successful tryout covering a dirt track auto race. His career highlights include lunch with Stan Musial, spring training chat sessions with Whitey Herzog, and being one of only two people he's aware of to witness the 62nd homer of both Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa.

Susan Perabo is writer in residence and associate professor of English at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Her story collection, *Who I Was Supposed to Be* (1999), was named a Book of the Year by the *Los Angeles Times*, *Miami Herald*, and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Perabo's first novel, *The Broken Places*, was published in 2001. Her nonfiction has recently appeared in several magazines and anthologies, and she is currently at work on a new collection of short stories. She holds a master of fine arts degree from the University of Arkansas–Fayetteville.

Rachael Perry's first collection of stories, *How to Fly* (Carnegie Mellon University Press, 2004), doesn't have any pop flies, sacrifice flies, infield flies, or fly-outs, but she hopes you'll like it anyway. She lives and writes in South Lyon, Michigan, where she tirelessly cheers on the Tigers and holds her breath for another pennant.

Kurt Rheinheimer's short story collection, *Little Criminals* (Eastern Washington University Press, 2005), includes two baseball stories. His fiction and essays have appeared in many magazines and newspapers, including *Redbook*, *Glimmer Train*, the *Baltimore Sun*, and others. He lives with his wife, Gail, in Roanoke, Virginia, where he is editor-in-chief of the glossy regional *Blue Ridge Country*.

Louis D. Rubin Jr., a native of Charleston, South Carolina, is University Distinguished Professor of English Emeritus of the University of North

Carolina–Chapel Hill. He retired from teaching in 1989 and as editorial director and publisher of Algonquin Books in 1991. Among his books is *The Quotable Baseball Fanatic* (2000).

Luke Salisbury is a professor of English at Bunker Hill Community College in Boston. He is the author of *The Answer Is Baseball* (Times Books), which the *Chicago Tribune* called the best baseball book of 1989, and a novel, *The Cleveland Indian* (Smith), which was nominated for the Casey Award in 1992, and *Blue Eden* (Smith, 1994), a novel in three stories. Mr. Salisbury contributed to *Red Sox Century: One Hundred Years of Red Sox Baseball*, *Baseball & the Game of Life*, *Ted Williams: A Portrait in Words and Pictures*, *DiMaggio: An Illustrated Life*, and *Jackie Robinson: Between the Baselines*. His work has appeared in the *Boston Globe*, *Ploughshares*, *Stories Magazine*, *PulpSmith*, *Confrontation*, *Fan*, *Elysian Fields*, *Spitball*, and *Nine*. Mr. Salisbury attended the Hun School, New College, and received an MA in creative writing from Boston University. His novel *Hollywood and Sunset* (Shambling Gate Press, 2005) was a finalist for a Ben Franklin, a *Foreword Magazine*, and an IPPY award.

Floyd Skloot's memoir, *In the Shadow of Memory*, won the 2004 PEN Center U.S.A. Literary Award. The sequel, *A World of Light*, appeared in 2005. Skloot's essays have been included in *The Best American Essays*, *The Pushcart Prize* anthology, *The Best American Science Writing*, and *The Art of the Essay*. He lives in Portland, Oregon.

Tom Stanton has been a journalist for twenty-seven years and a Detroit Tigers fan for ten more. He has authored three baseball books: *Hank Aaron and the Home Run That Changed America* (HarperCollins, 2004), *The Road to Cooperstown* (St. Martin's Press, 2003), and *The Final Season* (St. Martin's Press, 2001), which won the Casey Award for the best baseball book of the year. A fourth book, *Ty & Babe*, will be released in 2007 by St. Martin's Press. He is also editor of *The Detroit Tigers Reader* (University of Michigan Press, 2005). He can be reached at <http://www.tomstanton.com>.

Michael Steinberg has written, cowritten, and edited five books and a stage play. In addition, his essays and memoirs have appeared in many literary journals and anthologies. Steinberg's last book, *Still Pitching*, was chosen by *Foreword Magazine* as the 2003 Independent Press Memoir of the Year. He is also the founding editor of the journal *Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction*. The fourth edition of his coedited anthology, *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction* (with Robert Root), is forthcoming in 2006.

Tim D. Stone's articles on business, baseball, or German unification have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Economist*, *Baltimore Sun*, and *San Francisco Chronicle*. He is writing a novel set in Berlin between German unification and the first Gulf War. He lives in San Rafael, California, with his wife and son.

Robert Vivian's first book was *Cold Snap as Yearning* (University of Nebraska Press, 2001). His first novel, *The Mover of Bones*, will be published in fall 2006 (University of Nebraska Press). His poems, essays, stories, and plays have been published in over fifty journals, and many of his plays have been produced in New York City. A long time ago he was an All-State center fielder in Nebraska. He teaches creative writing at Alma College in Michigan.