

When boy meets 1st mitt, it's a true glove story

Baseball is as much a game of history as it is of skill. That's why I'm putting my son's recently retired first mitt in our safe deposit box.

Not that I think Cooperstown eventually will come calling for it. My boy has a fairly live pitching arm for a third grader, but he's already displaying serious issues hitting the inside breaking stuff in our Wiffle ball matches. I want to lock up his mitt for a selfish reason: I wish I still had my first ball glove.

That long-gone relic had been given to me the spring I turned 7. My mom passed it to me from a friend whose own child had graduated from wanting to learn to turn the perfect double play to wanting to teach how to turn the perfect pirouette.

Yes, my first mitt was a hand-me-down from a ballet teacher. Specifically, my sis-



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ter's ballet teacher.

I had recently followed the light to the Church of Baseball so this was quite the baptismal gift. I accepted it without hesitation, too excited to worry that the cowhide might be a carrier of girl cooties. As a quick study of the game, I was already prepared should anyone peer under the wrist strap to discover the name of my glove's original owner. I would say that if Shoeless Joe Jackson could hit .400 with a bat named "Black Betsy" then I could win a Gold Glove

with a mitt called "Sheila W."

Most people wouldn't bother with my mitt anyway. The lining of the ring finger turned slightly inside out, causing borrowers to complain about the awkward fit. To me, though, it felt just fine.

We spent many hours together that year. Catching sky-scrapping flies my dad threw until his shoulder ached. Snagging tennis balls off the basement wall, which today still bears a strike zone I fashioned from masking tape. Snaring imaginary line drives as I lay on the playroom floor listening to Bob Murphy describe the play of another pitiful Mets team.

Spring turned to summer, summer to autumn. The air turned crisp and others to football, but I stayed in my backyard, single-handedly catching all 27 outs to win another imaginary World Series, until I was

called in for lunch. I dropped my mitt next to the tree serving as the Green Monster and went inside.

That was the last I saw of it.

When I returned 20 or 30 minutes later, ball and glove had vanished.

Since we lived in North Stamford, where zoning and woods hamper most contact with civilization, my claim that desperados, hell bent for third-hand leather, rode though and swiped it while I downed a grilled cheese didn't register. My parents concluded that a never-before- and never-since-seen dog wandered through and took it home as a chew toy. As I grew older, I started suspecting convenient scapegoating to counter an early request I made to Santa for a puppy.

Instead, for Christmas I received another glove and it was

good, serving me through Tiny League at Dorothy Heroy Park and my first year in Little League. That one is gone, too, though I suspect it fell as a silent and unmourned victim during a zealous spring cleaning.

Also gone are the baseballs from my only two home runs in organized ball and the one from the night at Turn of River Middle School when I went 5-for-5 with the game-winning single in a 13-year-old All-Star game.

Maybe the same mysterious hellhound who visited our backyard years before made a return visit. Who knows? I just hope that they eventually found their way to the comforting leather pocket of my old reliable Sheila W.

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