

So You Want to be a Major Leaguer?

PREFACE

I looked at the slip of paper in my hand. I had never seen anything like it. It was yellow and square. The heading read: “National Association of Professional Baseball.” The next line was: “Buffalo International League AAA.” Then came my name: “Cy Block.” My eyes kept moving down the sheet, until they hit the following:

“Optionally assigned with right of recall.

Assigned outright.

Conditionally assigned.

Released outright and unconditionally.”

The first three lines had been x-ed out. My eyes held on the last one — “Released outright and unconditionally.” I had never seen a paper like it but I knew what it meant. I was out of a baseball job for the first time in 14 years. I was stunned. I was sick. And, as I turned away from George Torporcer, manager of the Buffalo club, and general manager Leo Miller, and walked out of their Avon, Florida hotel room, I couldn’t believe it.

Could I really be through? It didn’t seem possible. I was only thirty-two. I had just come off a .300 season with the Bisons in 1950. I had a lifetime batting average of .331. And, yet, as I strolled back to my room that April 8, 1951 afternoon, there was my unconditional release in my hand. A yellow, square piece of paper; all that was left of 14 years of devotion to a game I loved.

How could I start all over again? The 14 years had flown but, looking back on what I went through, they represented a lifetime. I thought of the thousands of miles traveled in the traditionally broken-down buses of the minor leagues, and the bus load of us who almost were killed; the 75-cents-a-day meal money I used to live on; the time I luckily avoided a fractured skull when beaned; the frequent fights I was propelled into by my roomie, Eddie Stanky; and my dealings with Baseball Commissioner Judge Landis. And, as I dropped limply into a chair, my thoughts wandered to the start of it all; the day I made up my mind that all I wanted was to play baseball.

CHAPTER 1: THE ROARING TWENTIES

I was bitten by the bug good and early. The desire was born when I was only nine. I can remember the day as though it were yesterday. It was a hot, summer afternoon in 1928. We had just broken up a stickball game outside Ebbets Field, which was five blocks from my home. We were kicking around ideas as to what we would do next, when someone suggested sneaking into the game. Five of us scaled the 12-foot bleacher wooden fence without being noticed and sat in on a game I’ll never forget.

It was a typical Dodger game of those days. Dazzy Vance was pitching against the Boston Braves and Babe Herman, of course, dropped a fly ball. The fans booed the Babe but, as so often happens, he got 'em cheering like crazy by hitting a homer that won the game. I'll always remember how Herman, amid all those cheers, reached into his pocket, drew out a rubber razzor and let the fans have a dose of their own medicine.

That was the start of my baseball career; although, for a long time, it was to consist of sneaking into a game at Ebbets Field. My favorite spot was the wooden bleacher fence. And I got to dislike a favorite cop who used to ferret us out like rats from such hiding places as the men's room, the ladies' room and any other bunk to which we'd scurry. He was tough to beat, this cop. The only edge we had on him was that he was fat, so that we could crawl under the bleacher seats, where he could see us but couldn't come and get us. Once he got his hands on us, though, we got booted out of the place. And I do mean booted.

If I couldn't sneak in over the fence, I'd try to make it with a kids' group. One day I was an orphan; the next I would be a boy scout and once I even tried to sneak in as a girl scout. If I got caught, I'd hang around outside all afternoon, picking up scraps of information on the score and waiting for the players to come out for autographs. It was one of those days when I was still feeling the cop's boot in the seat of my pants that I had my first meeting with one of my earliest heroes — Van Lingle Mungo.

Mungo had started against the Giants that afternoon and had been knocked out in the seventh. So, before the game was over, he was showered and leaving the park when I, together with my friend Peppy Weiner, who is one of the country's leading wine salesmen today, collared him. Mungo was just climbing into his car when we asked him for his autograph. He hurled an infuriated "No!" at us, whereupon Peppy needled him with: "If you don't give us the autograph, we'll put the horns on you for the next seven games." We didn't wait for his answer, because the next thing we knew, he was chasing us. Well, he raced after us for a good three blocks before he gave up. The strange part of it is that he lost the next four or five games. Mungo later was to become one of my instructors at the first baseball school I ever attended and we got many a laugh recalling the incident, but he didn't think it was funny when it happened. With this introduction to baseball, I went out for, and made, the P. S. 91 team in 1930 as an outfielder. I probably was the smallest outfielder in New York City school history, because I was a little over five feet tall and weighed about 110 pounds. Once I started playing, I was up at six in the morning and didn't get home until nightfall. There weren't enough hours in the day for me; there never are when you're doing the thing you like best.

Naturally, my mother didn't take to it kindly. In those days, ballplayers were supposed to be beer drinkers and loafers. So Mom repeatedly would say: "Baseball is for bums; study to be a lawyer or a doctor." And many a time she'd take the stick in an effort to make it stick. She'd fan me, but she couldn't cool me off, nor could the Boys' High School coach, who constantly had me escorted from the field because he believed I "couldn't catch a cold, let alone a ball," I wanted to play baseball and nothing was going to stop me.

Since my high school coach wouldn't let me play, I formed my own league. With fellows in the neighborhood, we got together a four-team league composed of the Falcons, the River Rats, the Fratres and the Embrooks. Each team chipped in \$5, which went to the one winning the pennant. Our games were played on weekends and holidays.

At Oakland Field, where it was first-come, first-served, we'd outfit a kid with a bottle of milk and some cookies and rush him there at six in the morning to stake a claim. Whenever we could get a permit, we'd play our other games at the Brooklyn Parade Grounds, where they have about thirty-five diamonds. As captain of my team. The Falcons, I picked my own position and thereby became a shortstop.

CHAPTER 2: MY FIRST TRYOUT

It was as a shortstop that I reported to Ebbets Field for my first tryout in 1937. When I walked through the door in the main rotunda, it was the first time I had gotten into the park without sneaking in. I was one of 7,000 boys who had answered the newspaper announcement of the tryout. We arrived at 9 a.m., fully equipped with spikes, gloves, uniforms and sandwiches. We were just a bunch of numbers, which were pinned on our backs. Zack Taylor, former St. Louis Browns' manager, was a Dodger coach in charge. Working with him were scout Ted McGrew, discoverer of fellows like Pete Reiser and Spec Torgeson, and the then-Elmira pilot, Bruno Betzel.

It was a week's tryout, from nine in the morning until five in the afternoon. The first day, they lined up all the hitters, myself included, from the plate to left field. We each got three swings against pitchers who'd face two men. At 12 o'clock, they stopped for lunch and I still was out in left field somewhere. As soon as they said we'd start again at one, everyone ran for a seat in the stands to eat. I calmly strolled towards home plate and sat right down on it, where I ate my sandwich and fruit. I had come to play baseball, not eat, and was anxious to get in my licks as quickly as possible. So when they resumed hitting, I was first up. I hit one good shot of my three, deep to left, and I was told to report the next day. The second day 3000 kids started hitting and pitching again.

That was the procedure for four days, until they were down to around 500. On the fifth day, the fielding tryouts began. The infield drill consisted of three or four rounds, in which you handled three grounders. When they didn't take my number, I knew I was sunk as a shortstop. So I grabbed another fellow who had been eliminated, switched uniforms with him so they wouldn't recognize me and moved over to second. Sure enough, they didn't recognize me and, when I looked pretty good over there, they took my number as a second baseman. I survived the tryout as part of a group of fifty. They sent us to Elmira, New York, to be distributed among the Dodger farm clubs. The Brooklyn club chartered a bus for us, put us up four-in-a-room and gave us a \$5, three-day meal ticket for a nearby diner. As soon as I got there, I knew I'd arrived. This was the start of my baseball career. I was the happiest kid in the bunch during those three days of Elmira workouts, because I'd made the grade despite constant advice to "give it up kid, you're too small."

Then they broke the sad news to me. They didn't have enough room for all of us in their farm system, which consisted of only five clubs in those days. So they picked out nine pitchers and two outfielders and told the rest of us to go home and try again next year. I'm not too ashamed to say I cried; and so did every one of those heart-broken kids who was handed his return bus fare. It was the longest ride home I ever took. I was thinking of the humiliation I would suffer facing my neighborhood pals, who, four days previously, had given me a big party sendoff. And I was thinking of the crushing blow to my dreams. It was a painful, discouraging situation but it didn't reduce my desire to play baseball in the slightest.

I was so determined to continue that I took a factory job assembling mirrors and brushes in order to save \$200 for Joe Stripp's Baseball School in Orlando, Florida. Out of my \$12 pay, I was able to bank \$5 a week. After saving about \$40, though, I read about a Pittsburgh Pirates' tryout in Jeannerette, Pennsylvania. So I took \$25, called my boss and told him I was sick and then took a night bus so that I could avoid sleeping expenses.

The Jeannerette team of the Pennsylvania State League was in last place at the time and 250 fellows who showed up for the three-day trial were told survivors would be assigned to Jeannerette contracts. If you were signed, you'd get your expenses refunded. I was put up in a boarding house that cost me \$1 a day. Since my round-trip fare was \$9, I had \$13 for meals. That was \$10 more than I needed, because milk, fruit and cake was my menu every meal.

The tryout consisted of a series of games. In the three I played, as a second baseman, I got seven hits. After I went 3-for-4 in the final game, I was sure I was in. I had done everything right and figured I was a cinch to survive the final cut. But Wilbur Cooper, former left-handed pitcher for Pittsburgh and then manager of Jeannerette, called me over and said: "Son, you did very well out there and have a lot of spirit. But I'm afraid you're too small to withstand the schedule we play in this league. Come back again next year when you're bigger. Drink milk. Grow up."

So I went home and drank milk until I began to moo. My family was on my neck to go to college. They kept telling me that everyone insisted I would never make a baseball player, so it was stupid of me to waste my time. But all I wanted was to play ball. So I picked up my factory job again and, with the help of \$150 from my older brothers Mack and Harry, I hopped a day coach in January, 1938, for the 1150-mile trip to Orlando and the Stripp school.

My expenses for the six-weeks' course, besides the \$53 round-trip railroad fare, were \$150 tuition and \$7 a week for room and board. I had \$50 spending money, most of which went for milk shakes, movies and gas for the tin-lizzy one of the fellows had. We lived four-in-a-room, sharing two double beds. Our day would start at 9 a.m. and end at 2 p.m. We had only two meals a day but all of us would have gone without eating if we had to.

The baseball instructors were Joe Stripp, the late Joe Tinker, Ben Cantwell, Jimmy Jordan, George Andrews, Lou Hurst and Van Mungo. Right off the bat. Tinker took me in hand and gave me personal instruction. I was really living. Imagine a kid with my baseball dreams not only meeting one of the Game's immortals but also spending hours every day being taught by him. When I'd roll into bed at the lights-out signal at 10 p.m. every night, my association with Tinker would make me smile as I thought of the many people who advised me to quit wasting my time because I'd never be a baseball player. Tinker's word was good enough for me. He told me I had the determination and spirit to overcome what I lacked in natural ability and assured me I would make the big leagues. This confirmed a singular opinion that existed all the time and was comforting to a kid who had two strikes on him from the start because of his size. After that appraisal, I honestly will say, without any partisanship, that I was unquestionably the hardest working boy among the 75 students. Stripp placed twenty-one of us in baseball jobs. I was notified, along with three of my buddies, that the next stop would be Jackson, Miss., where the Memphis Chicks of the Southern Association were going to hold tryouts in three weeks. Stripp told us to go home and wait until we heard from the Chicks. Five

of us chipped in about six bucks a piece for a 1929 Chrysler that had no windows and no brakes; and sometimes, even the motor seemed to be missing.

CHAPTER 3: SPRING TRAINING

It was February, 1938, and we started out from Orlando with 1937 plates and weren't stopped until we hit the Holland Tunnel. We were darn lucky we weren't, because we never would have gotten it started again. The car had a battery that was deader than a Saturday night in Waxahachie, Texas. We had to keep the motor running at all times. When it came mealtime, we ate in shifts so that there would always be someone at the wheel. With everyone pushing, the best "Stripp's Jalopy" could do was 35 mph. We shared the wheel so that some of us could grab a few hours of sleep and, by continuous driving, except for meals, we made New York in 2 1/2 days.

We must have scared the Holland Tunnel cops. Here was this broken down ghost of a car, manned by five frozen kids, who were padded out of proportion with six sweatshirts to guard against the freezing wind that swept through the windowless job. They questioned us about the 1937 plates and, after we explained that we were baseball players, they allowed us to go through. They told us we'd be lucky to make it. You know something; they were right. For just as Bert Moser, the last driver, pulled up to his Long Island home, the car gave a last gasp and dropped dead. We sold the corpse to a graveyard for ten bucks.

Three weeks later, after futilely trying to convince my neighborhood pals that I finally had clicked, I was paying my own bus fare for a three-day trip to Jackson. If you have ever ridden three days and nights on a jumpy bus that makes your stomach bounce like a yo-yo, you'll know what I mean when I say you get off not knowing where you started from, where you're going or where you are. I climbed off the contraption in a complete fog at 11 a.m. and was in a ball game at one o'clock. I was off again.

There were 700 of us competing in games under the customary numbering setup. This tryout, however, was different for me. I had been given the impression by Joe Tinker that I was all set for a baseball contract and these trials merely were workouts. Consequently, I didn't feel the usual pressure and was able to rap the ball pretty well. After a week of player cuts, I survived along with my two Stripp school friends, Joe Miko and Pacy Mendelsohn, who now were my roomies. About 50 of us entered the final day, figuring that half of us would go. I thought I was a cinch to stick until the phone rang in the hallway of our boarding house the morning of that last day. One of the boys answered it and it was for Joe Miko, one of my roomies. Miko, had been the best hitter in the whole tryout. He was getting two, three hits a game. And he, too, felt certain he would soon get word that he was moving into organized baseball. He got word, but nothing he expected.

As Joe picked up the receiver that was dangling from the wall, we, his three roomies, crowded around. He listened for a second and then murmured: "You cut me? How can you cut me? I'm hitting .468." There were seconds of silence; his face turned the most sickening-looking white I have ever seen. He slowly hung up, turned and kept muttering to himself: "How can they cut me? How can they cut me?" The tears started rolling down his cheeks. He walked back into the room and we silently followed him. He didn't say a word. We didn't say a word. He couldn't believe it had happened; and it opened our eyes

to the reality that it could happen to us. We felt for him and were scared for ourselves.

Miko was sure there had been some mistake. So, when we went out to the ballpark for the final two games of the tryout, he tagged along. He went immediately to Billy Southworth, who, as manager of Memphis, was in charge of the tryout, and was assured that it had been no mistake. Southworth told Miko that, despite his batting average, he just didn't think he was good enough. Joe hung around until we finished the workout and then he went back to the boarding house with us.

Now came the real sweat. Knowing what had happened to Miko didn't make the next nine hours a picnic. The phone rang a couple of times and we were too scared to answer it. Came 8:30 the next morning and no calls for us. Which meant that we could report to the ball park and receive our minor league assignment. It also meant a parting of the ways with the broken-hearted Miko. When we left for the park that morning, he left for Orlando, 700 miles away, to see Joe Stripp about another baseball opportunity with five of our seven dollars in his pocket. When he reached Orlando 10 days later, with a quarter left, Stripp got him a job cutting grass so that he could earn fare home to Connecticut in the event he couldn't make a team in the Florida State League. He wrote and thanked us for the \$5 and we learned that he subsisted on milk and chocolate bars for 10 days, slept in railroad stations where he figured he wouldn't get rolled of the little money he had and hitch-hiked all the way back to Stripp's school. His letter ended with: "How could they cut me? I was hitting .468."

There were exactly twenty-seven anxious survivors of that tryout who reported to Southworth for contracts on March 10, 1938. They called us into the clubhouse office in groups of four and I went in with my two roomies and another fellow. Southworth offered each of us a blank Class D contract for \$65 a month. He told us that Memphis had three farm clubs — Paragould in the Class D Northeast Arkansas League, Bowling Green in the Class D Kitty League and Greenville, Mississippi, in the Class C Cotton States League — and, after they looked us over in the Memphis Chicks Spring training camp, they would assign us. Later I was to find out that my signing of a blank contract was not only a violation of Baseball Law but also of civil law, since I signed it at eighteen-years-old without the accompanying signature of my parents; and I was to take my case to Judge Landis in 1941. But now I was anxious to get going and had my hand on the pen when one of the fellows asked Southworth for our bus refund. Southworth said he didn't know anything about it but our self-appointed spokesman insisted that we each get our \$27 or we don't sign. I almost choked to death on his words.

Fortunately, wise, old Joe Tinker was there helping Southworth conduct the tryout. He got Billy to agree to discuss the matter with Tom Watkins, president of the Chicks, and on Tinker's say-so, we signed the contracts immediately. Southworth came through for us the next day. It came in handy, too, because I was down to my last three bucks.

We all hopped into chartered buses and rode over to Gulfport, Mississippi, the regular Spring training camp of the Memphis Chicks. There we reported at 9 a.m. daily, two hours before the regulars, and worked out until 4:30. Everything was on the house — room and board and the daily lunches of sandwiches and milk. I felt great.

The first day I looked pretty good with the stick. Southworth asked me to take a few swings in the regulars' hitting drill the next morning. He wanted to see what I could do against the flinging of guys like Hugh Casey and Carl Doyle, who were later to achieve

fame with the Dodgers and A's. I stood by waiting my turn as Joe Grace, Sid Gautreaux, Cully Rickard and Buddy Bates took their whacks. Then I stepped in for a few raps and got one I didn't expect. For Andy Reese, the ex-Giant second baseman and then a player-coach for the Chicks, came over and rapped me in the shin with a bat handle, as he said:

"Listen, bush. You only hit when we call you in from the outfield. You get out there and shag."

I didn't wait, nor did I appeal to Southworth, who was in another part of the field handling another phase of the workout. I got out to the outfield in record time and hid myself in the traffic. We remained in that camp two weeks, working harder than I ever had before because Southworth was a guy who believed in packing as much work as he could into the 7 1/2-hour day. All the fundamentals I had learned in the Stripp School were expanded during that stretch, as I got an advanced education in sliding, running the bases, hitting and position-playing.

Southworth, evidently liked the way I looked, so did the owner of the Jackson, Mississippi team of the Class B Southeastern League, with which Memphis had a working agreement. I was the only one of the chosen twenty-seven to be assigned that high and I soon was heading back to Jackson in the car of George Brannon, the club owner, and with a \$100-a-month contract. No need to tell you how a kid of eighteen felt about that.

Although I had twelve consecutive weeks of tryouts and Spring training and faced two more with the Jackson club, I didn't lose my enthusiasm. Not even the weirdest boarding house I ever was to live in could dampen my spirits; although it did quite a job on my memory. If I live to sell a million dollar insurance policy. I'll never forget the two weeks I was forced to stay there. I say forced because the club was paying my way and I had only \$20 to my name. Believe me, if I could have bought my way out of the place with my last cent, I would have.

It was a two-story, broken-down house. I had a small room on the ground floor, which I shared with two other guys and a family of mice. While we slept, the mice would come out at night and chew on our shoes. They probably were as disgusted with the food in the house as we were. We couldn't even look at the slop served us, let alone eat it, yet the woman who owned the house would put a lock on the icebox every night so we wouldn't steal her food.

But the weirdest thing about the place was one of the boarders.

He was a mysterious character who seemed to spend all his time rocking in a creaking porch chair. We soon found out he got out of it once in a while. We caught him in our room one afternoon and what do you think the guy was doing? He was taking slugs of our rubbing alcohol! For days we had been puzzled over the disappearance of the stuff. We'd come home after a rough day ready for a rub, only to discover that our bottle was empty. This guy was drinking 85% pure alcohol.

At the end of two weeks, Jackson manager Max Rosenfeld, former Dodger outfielder, told me that I was too inexperienced for the league. They had, also, purchased Footsie Blair from the Cubs, so I had to go. I was told I was being returned to Memphis. They tore up my contract, saying I didn't need it anymore, and didn't even give me a release

slip; which was another baseball illegality I was to discover later.

The Jackson club gave me a bus ticket to Gulfport, where Memphis was preparing to break camp. I got there in time to experience my first pullman berth trip. We arrived in Memphis five days before the season opener and Southworth told me I would be assigned to a club in a day or so. I finally was handed another bus ticket for a 100-mile trip to Paragould, Arkansas.

CHAPTER 4: MY FIRST PROFESSIONAL LEAGUE GAME

When I got there in early April, I discovered that Paragould was about a month away from its opener. So I had to wade through almost four weeks of Spring training, in addition to another dozen second basemen. I was signed to a \$65-per-month contract and, once again, was to later find out that I should have been paid at the rate of my \$100-a-month contract with Jackson because a first year man in organized baseball could be raised but not cut. But who knew, or cared, about anything but playing baseball in those days?

After setting a world's record of four months and three days of Spring training, I finally played my first game in organized baseball. It was a night game in Jonesboro, Arkansas, which was 22 miles as the bus crawled from Paragould. There were 2,000 fans packed into the stands and they got on me, a fresh rookie, on my first batting turn. I was so scared, I swung at the first pitch and sliced it into right center for a double. That did it for me. I loosened up to get another hit, a single, and handle seven chances without an error. We won a typical pitcher's battle of a Class D League, 11-9. We were the happiest bunch of kids in the world. There were ten of us on the fourteen-man roster making our first organized baseball start and we really celebrated. Even the management was happy over our success. We were given all the free hamburgers we could eat for the opening-game victory; which was a banquet for a gang of youngsters being paid 75 cents a day meal money. We then piled back into our bus in our dirty, sweaty uniforms, and sang our way over the dirt roads all the way back to Paragould.

About an hour later, I finally got out of the wet uniform and into a shower in my \$4-a-month room which I shared with a teammate, Tom Pullig former Giant pitcher. We had to be careful about those uniforms, incidentally, because we had only one and it was cleaned once a month. The next day I received my first taste of Paragould friendliness I'll never forget. They paraded us through the town and introduced us to the fans over a mike parked in front of City Hall. We showed our appreciation by giving them an opening day home victory that afternoon.

Paragould was a typical minor league town. They gave us a free haircut, a gallon of ice cream and a chicken dinner for every homer; a pair of shoes to the pitcher who pitched a shutout and they'd pass the hat around for a winning hit, or play, generally getting about \$30. Everybody had a favorite player and, since it was a farming town, you'd receive daily gifts of fruits and vegetables from your admirers. Every day was a party, not a ball game. On Saturday, which was our off-day, the women would throw a picnic for us. It was one, big happy family.

That was some league. We had two ump's named Rough and Tough and another one

named Tony McDonald, the umpire-in-chief, who packed a .45 on his hip as part of his cowboy regalia. He never had an occasion to use it during a game, because everyone had the sense not to find out if he could. Each team traveled in converted, tin-roofed school buses which seated about eighteen. The players took turns driving, even I. One day they let me at the wheel and it was my first and last chance. I got stuck on the railroad tracks with a train bearing down on us. Man, did those guys head for the windows! There were very few of us left when I got the rattle-trap off the tracks just in time. They sent in a pinch-driver for me.

We were one of the fortunate teams in the league. We had a mechanic on our roster by the name of Cliff Robertson. Many of the clubs often were late because their bus would break down but, thanks to Robby, we seldom missed the starting time. As dilapidated as the buses were, they always got there — eventually.

I received a real, good education that season. During the days, we played in unbearable heat that sometimes hit as high as 110 and never went lower than 95. And night games were played under brutally dangerous lights, particularly in Caruthersville, Missouri, where one of our guys went to bat one night wearing a miner's hat as a gag. Another night, Harry Feldman, the ex-Giant hurler, had the lights go out on him in Blytheville just as he pitched. The hitter, Johnny Martin of my team, and catcher Angel Aragon, former Giant and now a scout in their chain, both dropped to the ground instinctively and the ump got it in the chest protector.

I led the league in hitting most of the season and dropped off to a final .322, which only Al Zarilla who later became a St. Louis Browns outfielder bettered in the loop and was tops on my club. I also broke the league record with 34 stolen bases, rapped 33 doubles and totaled 210 bases. Just before the end of the season, Memphis recalled me and the town threw me a Block Night at which it collected \$11. They spent \$8 on a traveling bag and gave me the rest in cash, besides sweaters, shoes, watermelons, cakes and other gifts.

I took a train to Memphis. When I walked into president Watkins' office, he not only refunded my fare but told me that I was to get a \$125-a-month contract for the rest of the season and promised that I would get a raise next year. The money sounded great. But who cared. This was the big leagues to me. Memphis was fighting for fourth place in the Southern Association and a playoff berth and I was proud to think that Southworth would call me up at such a crucial moment. I played in only one complete game of the remaining fifteen. But the club, nevertheless, never could have done without me. I was to become the fall-guy for almost every practical joker on the team. Hugh Casey was the biggest of 'em all. The first road trip I made with him was a dilly. It was a week's visit to Atlanta and Chattanooga and Hugh went to work right off the bat. The first thing he did was to get one porter to take my bag off the train and ship it to the Memphis club's office. I discovered the loss when we got to Chattanooga and I made the junket with only a toothbrush from then on.

Meanwhile, I was sitting on the train talking to Carl Doyle, Cully Rickard and Andy Reese when Hughie walked over and snipped my tie in half with a scissor. A few minutes later I was engrossed in a paper when I suddenly sniffed smoke. I looked around for the fire and found it was nearer than I thought. Casey had set fire to my newspaper. Then, after a rough night in my upper, the fellows asked how I had slept. I told them fine, except that it seemed a bit bumpy. They laughed and Casey reached up and pulled a hat

from underneath my mattress.

That was only a sample of what I went through as a “fresh busher” with the Memphis Chicks. It was all in fun and I took it with a smile; although, I had no alternative. Casey, though, made amends. When we got back to Memphis, he presented me with a new shirt and tie. I never met a guy who was as carefree as Hughie was off the diamond and as business-like on it. He lived and died baseball. After being used solely as a pinch-hitter for the Chicks, Southworth finally put me in against Doc Prothro’s Little Rock team the last day of the season. The Chicks had clinched their playoff spot and the game meant nothing to them. It was the World Series to me. I played second, went 1-for-3 and handled five chances with one error. My role in the playoff, however, was strictly as pinch-hitter. Paul Richards’ Atlanta club eliminated us in the first round.

CHAPTER 5: THE LONG CLIMB TO THE MAJOR LEAGUES

I went home happily armed with evidence I knew would convince my skeptical neighborhood pals and parents that I had made good in baseball. After paying my way home, I figured that the \$50 I had saved from 4 1/2 months’ salary never would get me through until next season. So I took a job pushing a truck for a wholesale dress manufacturer for \$15 a week. In the middle of February, 1939, Memphis sent me a contract calling for \$125 a month. Although it didn’t include the promised raise, I signed it without a question. I was much more concerned with jumping to Class A baseball than jeopardizing my chances by insisting on the raise.

I was so anxious to get started, I reported to the Deland, Fla., training base of the Chicks with the pitchers, a week before the regular squad. Memphis told me I would have to pay my own expenses if I came down with the pitchers; so I did. Frank Brazill, who became manager when Southworth moved up to Rochester, immediately converted me into a third baseman because he had a five-year Memphis vet at second. I hit very well, played good ball but was too green. They farmed me out to Greenville, Mississippi, the Queen City of the Delta. I was shipped there with Earl Naylor, who was to make it with the Phillies. Greenville offered me the customary Class C contract, which is \$85 per month. I told the manager, Jimmy Powell, that I thought I should be paid under the terms of my \$125 contract with Memphis. He said that I was getting the regular Class C salary but promised me the difference if I had a good season; in other words, \$160.

I was getting annoyed, however, by the repeated broken promises. I couldn’t fathom how people could be so picayune; particularly with money that meant so much to kids playing for barely expenses. But a promise still was a promise to me; although, I would have signed with Greenville without one.

So I went into Spring training, for a change. I now was a third baseman. Naylor was my roomie in a very fine private home where we not only slept but were invited to Sunday dinner as well. Class C was a tremendous improvement over Class D ball in every sense. Although we were given only \$1-a-day meal money on the road, the hotel accommodations were far superior, since we visited such towns as Hot Springs, Arkansas, Clarksdale, Mississippi, and Monroe, Louisiana. The competition, naturally, was much faster. Whereas we had only a handful of future major leaguers like Feldman, Zarilla, Mike Kreevich and Johnny Sain in Class D, here I was to meet fellows like Jake Jones, Jack Conway, Earl Harrist, Jack Kraus, Johnny Rucker, Ed Albosta and my teammates, Johnny Beazley and Thurman Tucker, to name a few.

The only thing in common with Class D was the bus and the mosquitoes; although, in all fairness, I will say that the Greenville contraption at least had windows. Whereas the biggest Class D jump I made was the 110-mile trip to Batesville, Arkansas, I now had a 300-mile lulu from Hot Springs, Arkansas, over dirt roads. In those days, the only way you could cross the Mississippi was by ferry. We would leave Hot Springs about 11 p.m. after a game and always miss the one o'clock ferry, which was the last one until 6 a.m. So we would have to sleep in the bus, fighting off those man-eating Class C mosquitoes, and just would get back to Greenville a half hour before game-time. I would have preferred that trip every night to spending only one day in Helena, Ark. I wouldn't say it was hot but on the coolest afternoons, you could boil eggs in the creek. At six o'clock, when the sun was down, it was merely 110 degrees. So whenever we went there for our three-game series, we would stay 40 miles away, across the Mississippi, in a Clarksdale, Mississippi, motor court.

It was on one of those trips from Helena that the whole club had a close call with death. The night was extremely foggy and, to complicate it further, we had a pitcher named Chick Galeria who was so nearsighted he had to wear thick bi-focals. Dr. Cyclops, we used to call him. Just our luck, his driving turn came up on this rough night. There he was hunched over the wheel, peering out of the front window, as though he could see something. The next thing we knew, we felt the bus leave the road and head down a slope. I thought this was it because we were traveling on a mountain road. Luckily we landed in a cotton patch. Dr. Cyclops was permanently relieved as our driver.

In mid-season, Powell lost his manager's job because we were in sixth place in the Cotton State League. He was replaced by Harry Whitehouse, but I didn't think much about it until the club, began bringing in new players, who were being paid \$125 a month. Since I was leading the club in hitting with .325, I decided it was time to talk money with president Edward M. Gray.

Naylor decided he would go with me, because as league home-run leader, he didn't like the idea of getting \$40 less than all the new-comers. When Mr. Gray denied knowledge of the promise made me by Powell and refused to talk money with me and Naylor, we told him we were quitting. He threatened us with suspension and promised we'd be blacklisted by organized baseball.

We decided to leave the next day. We never got the chance. For that afternoon we were in a movie when a couple of State Troopers interrupted the film and asked us to accompany them to the office of league president. Judge Emmet Harty. He listened to my story, agreed that I had a justifiable complaint but said that, since I had nothing in writing, I had no legal leg to stand on. He advised Naylor and I to finish the season and he would try his best to get us compensated. Although Judge Harty made a sincere effort, we never did get our money. I wound up with .315, the best team average, while Naylor's 27 homers led the league. We didn't make the playoffs and I went home the end of August with a Memphis recall for next year in my pocket, while Naylor finished the season with the Chicks. But before I went home, I was armed with the knowledge, passed on by a veteran teammate, that I had a case against Memphis.

I was anxious to play baseball but not for Memphis. I didn't like the way the club did business. So, I applied to Judge William G. Bramham, minor league czar, for my free agency on the grounds that I had been signed to an illegal Class D blank contract and had never received option slips from Memphis in 1938. When Judge Bramham ruled against

me, because I had filled my complaint too late, I appealed to the executive committee of minor league baseball, which consisted of George Trautman, president of the American Association; Earl Mann, president of the Atlanta Crackers and Dr. E. M. Wilder, president of the South Atlantic League. The decision was two to one against me and I was advised that I could make the supreme appeal — to Judge Landis. So I did.

Just before I left my dress house Winter job to go to the Memphis Spring training base at Wauchula, Florida, with a \$150-a-month signed contract, I filed my appeal with Judge Landis and was not to get a decision until two years later. Meanwhile, I reported to the Chicks. President Watkins told me I had a good chance to make the club if I dropped my claim. I told him that all I wanted was to play baseball but not for an organization that wouldn't play it square with me. I asked to be traded and I was — to the Brooklyn chain, the one I always dreamed of getting into, for pitcher John Gaddy.

I went right back where I started — to Elmira of the Class A Eastern League — and had my first taste of Larry MacPhail. I joined the Pioneers in their Macon, Georgia, training camp after a pullman ride paid for by the Memphis club. A few hours after I had checked into the Lanier Hotel, I pinched-hit a three-run homer against Macon. Manager Bill Killifer immediately installed me as second baseman. Before we headed north for Elmira, a few days later, I felt sure I would open the season with the club. I didn't seem to have any real competition for the job whereas there were real dogfights going on for other positions, in which fellows like Wally Westlake, Ed Head and Paul Gillespie were involved.

Westlake didn't make it. He was shipped to a lower league shortly after we reached Elmira. I was prepared to stay for the season and began looking around for permanent quarters, since the club stopped paying our hotel expenses as soon as the season started. The day before the opener, business manager Charley Miller called me to his room and offered me a contract for \$150-a-month, the same amount I was supposed to get with Memphis. I was about to sign it, when he said:

“You ought to have a good year in Grand Rapids.” Michigan State League Class C.

I was startled. I dropped the pen. Grand Rapids? I told Miller I had just come from a Class C league and hit .315. I pointed out that if I went there and hit .300 again, they'd say I should hit .300, since I did it last year, so I'd be proving nothing. And if I didn't hit .300, they'd say I had been lucky and I'd lose everything I had gained. Miller said I had to go because MacPhail had just purchased a second baseman named Morrie Jacobs from Binghamton for Elmira and the Grand Rapids team of the Michigan State League needed a second baseman. I was it. So, without signing a contract, I went to Killifer, who confessed no knowledge of my being slated for Grand Rapids and repeated that he thought I was his second baseman. He was enlightened by Miller and then apologetically told me there was nothing he could do for me.

I wasn't far from Brooklyn, so I packed and went home. I was there about three days when the Dodger office called me and asked me to come in and see MacPhail. Not wishing to get involved deeply in baseball intricacies that were over my head, I dragged my older brother. Mack, along, I told MacPhail that I wasn't trying to be a hungry kid who wanted to jump into the majors right away. I assured him that all I wanted was to play baseball; but, at the same time, get the opportunity to advance if I proved myself.

I showed him where I had proved myself in D ball and moved to C ball. Then I showed where I had proved myself in C ball. I told him I didn't think it was fair to ask me to waste another year in C ball. I suggested that he give me a month's trial in a higher classification. He agreed with everything I said. He then told me that the third baseman of the Macon Peaches had broken his leg. And then he added:

"Cy, this is a wonderful opportunity for you. Macon is in the Sally League, which is the fastest B league in the country; faster than the Piedmont. If you can hit .300 in that league, we'll take a look at you for Brooklyn next year."

He whipped \$50 out of his pocket and gave it to me as expenses for the trip to Macon. I joined the team in Columbia, South Carolina., and stepped right into the lineup. That's when I met Stanky, with whom I was to play for two years at Macon. That's also the year Stanky met his future father-in-law, Milton Stock who was the Peaches' manager. My first game was an uneventful one, in which I got only a single in four trips. But I could hardly forget the first night. Our bus, a real, high class affair compared with the jeeps I had been riding in, ran out of gas. The team had to push the darn thing for two miles before we found a gas station. When we got back to Macon, I had no place to sleep. Stanky offered to set me up at the Central Hotel where he lived. Within a week, we were roomies. I'll never be able to figure out why he picked me. He always was a loner but for some reason we got together. And were were to eat, sleep, play and fight together; we both obviously were cut from the same competitive cloth. Stanky was a holy terror in those days, when ever he was mad he would curve me in infield practice from his shortstop position. As a result of this I refused to take infield practice with him. But I couldn't stay mad at him; no one could, once you got to know him. You soon realized that Stanky had been fighting for everything since he was a kid; it was him against the world. He had it extremely rough and, consequently, looked on life as a dog-eat-dog affair.

Once I broke his favorite bat and he didn't speak to me for four days. He could get four straight hits, pop up the fifth time, and you never saw a fellow so enraged. He fought, kicked and scratched every inch. He was the greatest competitor I've ever known; even Ty Cobb couldn't top him in playing it to the hilt. If he was having a bad day, he'd kick the rival second baseman's glove into the outfield. And his favorite football was the one owned by Connie Ryan, Former N.Y. Giant second baseman.

We were playing in Savannah one night and Stanky was in the throes of getting the collar in the first game of a doubleheader. Having already booted our water bucket almost into manager Stock's lap, Eddie went for Ryan's glove, Ryan then went for Eddie. For five minutes, they threw punches, surrounded by a protective circle of players, and they hadn't landed one yet. The police finally broke through and, in accordance with a local ordinance, took Stanky and Ryan to the station house and booked them for disturbing the peace. This happened between games. The team presidents posted \$100 bail for Ryan and Stanky and they got back in time for the second game. Everything was peaceful thereafter. But, as a result of the rumpus, the players got a real break. Our president, Roy Williams, got mad at the town of Savannah and moved us out of the hot city to the beautiful Tybee Beach Hotel, about twelve miles from the city limits and right on the ocean. We stayed at that cool spot whenever we went to Savannah that season, thanks to Stanky.

Thanks to Stanky, too, we almost got murdered one night in Greenville, South

Carolina, He played so hard that it rubbed off on you. We had an agreement, introduced by Stanky, of course, that anyone who failed to break-up a double play had to toss a quarter into our chicken-dinner kitty. We soon got the reputation of being the roughest team in the league. And, consequently, Al Campanis one of our infielders threw a murderous block on Greensville third baseman, Teddy Ratinski, in an effort to maintain our rep. Seconds later, we were grabbing bats from our dugout rack as the fans poured out of the stands. Fortunately, they had adequate police protection and the cops broke it up before we were broken up.

I wound up hitting .311, which was pretty good for a league that boasted Ray Sanders, Billy Johnson, Ford Garrison, Tommy Mc-Bride, Ralph Houk, Al Lakeman, Ray Lamanno and Ellis Clary. We went to the final in the playoffs, where we lost to a Columbus team that had Johnny Beazley, Fred Martin, Sanders and player-manager Clay Hopper. I had a great playoff, going 20-for-48.

I went home and spent the 1940-41 Winter working for a retail dress chain. In the meantime, my contract had been sold to Montreal when the Brooklyn Dodgers pulled out of Elmira. I knew the Dodger personnel better than my name and figured that Alex Kampouris, Johnny Hudson and Don Ross were sure to be dropped to Montreal and, consequently, I had little chance to stick. So I went to Branch Rickey, Jr., then farm director under MacPhail, and asked that he ship me to Portland of the Pacific Coast League for 1941 season. That would mean a promotion to Double A ball and also give me a good opportunity to make a team that had finished last. Rickey told me I had a fine chance of making the Montreal roster and, therefore, I should report to its camp in Macon, Georgia. Shortly after, I signed a \$250-a-month contract with Montreal, I received word from Judge Landis to see him in Clearwater, Florida, about the complaint I had filed with him two years back. I went down to the Bellvue Biltmore Hotel and for two hours, I told him my story, as a public stenographer recorded every remark between us.

He was very cordial and down-to-earth. He made me feel that he sincerely was going to help me. All he wanted from me was the truth. He said:

“Son, if you tell the truth, you have nothing to fear.”

The truth was that I had been signed illegally to a blank Class D contract and had been transferred from club to club without any release or option slips. I sought my free agency on those grounds. He told me I'd hear from him as soon as he checked all the facts; which was to be during the 1941 World Series.

I headed back to Macon to join the Montreal Royals. I played a few games for manager Clyde Sukeforth, didn't do too badly but realized my number was up as soon as Brooklyn cut its squad. Sure enough, just as I had figured, down came Kampouris, Ross and Hudson. It was a rough roster to break into for a comparatively inexperienced kid of twenty-one. There was Roy Hughes, Bob Ramazzotti, Babe Phelps, Ed Albosta, Stan Rojek, Woody Jensen, Red Lucas and Mungo, who had just been shipped in by Brooklyn after his famous Havana fling.

It was a triple camp, with players from Montreal, Durham and Allentown. The place was jumping with about ninety guys. Sukeforth broke the news to me that one of the clubs, Durham, was my next stop. Rojek and Ramazzotti were happy to be assigned to

the Class B Piedmont League, since they were coming off a Class C season, but I wasn't. I went to see MacPhail, who was staying at a hotel in town. When I entered MacPhail's room, he was talking with Charley Dressen, who was then Dodger coach under manager Leo Durocher. I told MacPhail that I had been notified I was to go to Durham. He admitted he knew all about it. I asked him for a chance with a Class A club, repeating my plea for a month's make-or-break trial. He said: "Son, I want you to go to Durham. It's the fastest B league in the country. If you have a good year there, I'll take you to Spring training with Brooklyn."

"You told me the same thing last year; that the Sally League was the fastest B league in the country," I answered. "I didn't believe the stuff about Brooklyn, naturally, but I sure expected to move up if I had a good year at Macon, as you promised. After all. I'm willing to spend as much time in the minors as I have to. But I want to go up the ladder when I produce, not slip back."

MacPhail denied having said any such thing. I was at the cross-roads again. All I wanted was to play baseball; and all I kept running into were broken-promises that made it difficult. I had to make a quick decision. And I made the only one that my conscience would allow — I told MacPhail I wouldn't report to Durham. I walked out of his room and, in the lobby, a little later, Rickey, Jr. told me McPhail had blown his stack and probably would sell me to darkest Africa. Man, I was low. I figured this was the finish of my career because MacPhail could sell me to a Class D team and it would either be play or no baseball.

Milton Stock saved me. Macon had broken away from the Brooklyn organization that year and Stock was now manager and part-owner. I met him shortly after the MacPhail rumpus and poured my heart out to him. He not only bought my contract but also paid me my Montreal salary of \$250 per, whereas \$200 was tops for Class B ball. So I was back with Stanky again, my little dynamite twin partner. The day after MacPhail got rid of me, I beat the Dodgers in an exhibition game with an 11th inning double. And the team that once was my greatest love, now became my pet hate.

My dealings with Brooklyn, thereafter, were to be from the other side of the fence. Prior to my rejoining Macon, I received a letter from the Dodgers. It referred to the \$50 expense money MacPhail had given me in April, 1940, when he convinced me to join Macon the first time. This was it:

"The Consolidated Ticket Office informs us that the cost of first-class transportation from Elmira to Columbia, South Carolina is as follows:

Elmira to Washington, D.C.....	\$ 9.55
Elmira to Washington Lower.....	2.65
Washington to Columbia	14.30
Washington to Columbia Lower	3.95
	30.45
Meals	5.00

“This totals \$35.45 against the sum of \$49.10 which was advanced to you by the Brooklyn club sometime during April of last year. Since the matter is now being investigated by our auditors, involving as it does Brooklyn funds advanced for the account of a minor league club, we would naturally like to have a refund for the difference of \$13.65 so that the transaction can be settled to the satisfaction of all persons concerned.”

CHAPTER 6: OUT OF THE DODGER CHAIN AND INTO THE CHICAGO CUBS ORGANIZATION

I sent the Dodgers a check for \$13.65 and, to this day, I can't figure out how they arrived at the \$49.10 figure and let me beat them out of 90 cents. That severed my last tie with them. When I picked up Macon again, I found out that it now had a working agreement with the Chicago Cubs. I had my same room with Stanky; a modern arsenal decorated with Eddie's hunting weapons. We had an uneventful Spring training; that is, compared with the one in 1940, when I first learned how tough a player Stanky really was.

There is one 1940 exhibition game, in particular, that sticks in my mind. We were playing Kansas City. This was some club. It had Johnny Lindell, Charley Stanceau, Tiny Bonham and Al Gerhauser among its pitchers; the outfield was Frenchy Bordagaray, Buster Mills and Buzz Boyle; the catchers were Tony DePhillips and Johnny Riddleand, the infield was Jerry Priddy, Johnny Sturm, Phil Rizzuto and Billy Hitchcock. It seems that Stanky and Rizzuto had been feuding for years; ever since Eddie was with Portsmouth and the Scooter was with Norfolk of the Piedmont League. Well, in this game, Rizzuto stole second under Stanky's tag with a head-first slide. Eddie was boiling and, when we went to the dugout, he told me to watch the next time and he would show me how to take care of Rizzuto. A few innings later, Rizzuto tried it again. In he zoomed head-first. And, just as he hit the bag, up came Stanky's knee to clip him in the eye. Out cold went Rizzuto and out in a blazing fury came his teammates. There was little Eddie Stanky, surrounded by such huge guys as Lindell, Bonham and Stanceau, screaming his head off at them to come on and fight. Fortunately, the umpires and cops were right on top of it. Rizzuto was led off with the most beautiful shiner you ever saw.

He was a tough guy, that Stanky. He could dish it out and, what's more, he could take it, too. He showed his guts repeatedly but never more than in 1941 when he was almost killed by a bean ball during a night game against Savannah in our park. The Indians had a fellow by the name of Ray Chamberlin on the mound and he let a duster fly at Stanky. There was no personal animosity behind the pitch; it was the routine duster tossed in every game to loosen up the hitters. This one caught Eddie in back of the left ear and he dropped in his tracks. He didn't move a muscle for five minutes and then went into a convulsion. We were sick and scared. The next thing I know, there was a priest kneeling over Stanky administering last rites. After 15 minutes, Eddie still was unconscious and they rushed him to the hospital. He didn't come to for a half hour. He had suffered a brain concussion and it was figured he would be confined to the hospital at least ten days.

About four days later, the hospital attendants found Stanky's bed empty. He had grabbed his clothes and slipped away to join us on the bus trip to Savannah; we, of

course, believing all the time that he had been discharged. Not only did he pull a sneak from what almost was his deathbed but, ironically, he stepped up immediately against the same pitcher who, accidentally, nearly killed him. Eddie calmly rapped Chamberlin for three doubles; the Stanky way of getting revenge. The injury, though, was to impair him permanently to the extent that he was rejected for military duty in World War II. That was to be one of my best seasons. I led the league with a .357 batting average and 112 runs batted in. I was a unanimous selection for the All-Star team and was voted most valuable player in the Sally League by the sportswriters. I was sold to the Cubs for \$15,000, while Stanky was sold to the Cubs' Milwaukee farm. Before I was to join the Cubs at Catalina Island in 1942, I heard from Judge Landis again. I met him in the Roosevelt Hotel in New York during the 1941 World Series between the Yankees and Dodgers.

We reviewed my case and Judge Landis told me I had a valid one. He said that if it hadn't been a good one, he never would have considered it because I had filed my claim after baseball's statute of limitations on such matters. He said I couldn't be given my free agency, since the Memphis club no longer owned me. But, if I could prove my complaint to him, I would receive \$15,000 — the equivalent of my purchase price by the Cubs. He never did tell me who was to pay it. It wasn't necessary. My case. Judge Landis told me, rested solely on my ability to prove that Billy Southworth had signed me to a blank Class D contract for the Memphis club in 1938. He then showed me a telegram in which Southworth denied ever having signed me. My case collapsed. It was my word against Southworth's. I never sought an explanation from Southworth. I simply forgot about it, realizing that it was hopeless to press it any further. And, after all, I was on the verge of breaking into the major leagues and was in the mood to accept any decision.

In the middle of January, I had my first major league contract. It called for \$400-a-month or \$2,000 a season. Not much by today's standards but considered good dough in those days, I didn't worry about the money, anyway. All I wanted was the chance because I felt I could stick in the big leagues and then make real money. By this time, I was a big wheel in the neighborhood. I was given a party before I left for the Cubs' training camp. About twenty-five of my pals put me in my train compartment. This was it. In five years, I had beaten my way out of the darkness of the bushes into the daylight of the majors. Boy, was I a happy kid. I could only think of a guy like Johnny Sain. Here was a talented fellow who still would be having his Newport, Arkansas to Caruthesville, Missouri commutation ticket punched if it weren't for Judge Landis. He spent four years in the Class D Northeast Arkansas League before Landis made him a free agent. He was there when I went to Paragould and still there after I left. The Cards had a string on both Newport and Caruthesville and they would shuttle fellows like Sain and Pete Reiser between the clubs. Sain won 15 games a year and earned only another chance in the same league the next year until Landis released him and Reiser, among a batch of other covered-up players. So I really appreciated my comparatively rapid climb to a big league shot.

On Feb. 20, 1942, I stepped onto beautiful Catalina Island after a terrible attack of sea-sickness. The Coast Guard had ferried us 22 miles across from Los Angeles. It was my first boat trip and the last, I hoped, after Paul Errickson, Stan Hack and Clyde McCullough helped twist my already upset insides by deliberately blowing smoke in my face. I hung over the side almost all the way and, at times, didn't even care if I fell in; I was that miserable.

As far as the Cubs were concerned, I was a bush kid with a good Class B record.

They had me destined for the Texas League but, like all kids in a spot like this, I was determined to burn up the place and remain with the Cubs. They roomed me in the St. Catherine Hotel with another rookie, pitcher Eddie Hanyzewski from Notre Dame. We both became camp sensations.

I murdered the ball right from the start with the B Squad under Kiki Cuyler, who had such rookies as Rip Russell, Eddie Waitkus, Len Merullo, Lou Novikoff, Johnny Schmitz, Emil Kush and Hank Wyse. We won eight in a row and the A squad dropped eight games in a row. So they switched Merullo, Novikoff and me to the A squad. I took over second from Lou Stringer, who had been “bought” from the Cubs’ Los Angeles farm for a reported \$100,000 to fill the vacancy left by Billy Herman’s sale to the Dodgers. In the ten days before we broke camp, I went so well that trainer Andy Latshaw told me Manager Jimmy Wilson had given him a list of players whose trunks were to be shipped to Chicago and my name was on it. Which meant, as far as I could determine, that I had made the team until at least the May roster-cutting deadline.

We started East, playing a series of exhibition games. My competition was Stringer and, although the writers somehow were certain he would stick and I would go, he wasn’t that sure and neither was I. It became a dog-eat-dog friendly scrap for the job on the way home. We, naturally, were watching each other like hawks. One day he got the dickens scared out of him. We were playing the Athletics in Tucson, Arizona. It was a city that Stringer and I were seeing for the first time. Yet, from the very first pitch, the people in the stands acted as though they had known Lou all his life. They booed the shirt off him every chance they got. He was puzzled and he was worried that manager Jimmy Wilson would react to the crowd’s appraisal. He couldn’t figure out why the fans were on him. Neither could I until, after the game, I met a Brooklyn pal Irving Goldberg who was spending the Winter in Arizona. To this day Stringer doesn’t know that my buddy, unknown to me, had organized a bunch of kids and scattered them throughout the stands with orders to get on Stringer and never let up. I died laughing when he told me.

It wasn’t so funny a few days later, as we were heading for Tulsa. Wilson called me into his compartment and broke the news to me. He said that Stringer was good for about 15 years at second, whereas Hack probably was in his last year at third. He explained that it would be foolish to waste my time waiting for Stringer’s job, although he had planned to keep me, while I could be playing somewhere and preparing to replace Hack. That somewhere was Tulsa of the Class A-1 Texas League. I was disappointed and I cried myself to sleep that night. It was like the world ending.

CHAPTER 7: VALHALLA—THE MAJOR LEAGUES

The next day I was optioned to Tulsa. Before I departed, however, Cubs’ general manager Jim Gallagher told me to sign for whatever the Oilers offered and he would make up the difference between the \$400-a-month agreement I had with Chicago. It’s standard procedure for a parent club to send a higher-salaried player to a farm team and absorb the difference in pay. So I received \$250-a-month from Tulsa and the Cubs sent \$150-a-month home to my folks. I became part of the roughest, toughest and hottest league in minor league baseball.

It was a top-grade circuit but, like all the lower class loops I had been in, there were no visiting clubhouses. You would have to dress and shower at your hotel and cab it to

the park at the club's expense. It had one big virtue; I was out of the bus leagues. We traveled first class and lived first class. On the team were Cliff Chambers, Clay Bryant, Don Johnson, Herschel Martin, Jittery Joe Berry, Marv Rickert and Wyse. The manager was Hardrock Roy Johnson.

We had a happy-go-lucky club that always was looking for laughs. We enjoyed a bellyful one night after a game in Shreveport, Louisiana. We had taken a few losses in a row and Johnson was in a bad mood. He ordered everyone to be in for bed check at 1 a.m. Some of the boys, however, didn't get back until after curfew and found Johnson on watch in the lobby. They sneaked up the fire escape, only to discover that they couldn't enter their rooms without keys. They couldn't go downstairs and be seen by Johnson, either. Someone suggested that one of them try and slip through a transom. Chambers was elected. They hoisted him up and he began squeezing into a small opening. He got his big shoulders halfway through and that's all. There was this 6-3, 200-pound guy squirming to get in or out, his body almost parallel with the ground.

As he screamed, "Get me out of here!" the rest of the fellows on the floor, myself included, stuck our heads out of the rooms and saw him. We howled with laughter that was as loud as Chambers' squeals. They finally yanked Cliff out and decided the only thing to do was to give themselves up to Johnson. A group consisting of Chambers, Rickert, Mel Hicks and Steve Tramback marched to the lobby and surrendered, but not unconditionally. For when Johnson notified them that each was fined \$25, Hicks rebelled and the others growled.

Hicks told Johnson that the players weren't getting paid enough to sustain such a fine. Hardrock answered that the fine was going to stick and the players were stuck. Hicks blew up. He moved out of the hotel and into another at his expense. Back in Tulsa, however, tempers had cooled and Hicks and the other players believed the fine would be forgotten. Came payday, a few days later, though, and there was \$25 less in the envelopes of Hicks, Chambers, Rickert and Tramback. When we went out on the field that night for practice, with the stands packed to see a Red Cross battle with Beaumont's Dick Wakefield, Hoot Evers, Johnny Lipon and Stubby Overmire, there were no Hicks, Tramback or Rickert. Chambers was prepared to play but Johnson found the rebel trio in the clubhouse. He was notified by spokesman Rickert that there would be no play if they didn't get their full pay. Johnson replied that they play or be banned from Baseball. To which Rickert laughed:

"I'm going into the service and YOU'RE threatening me with a baseball ban."

Johnson saw that the players weren't kidding nor could they be bulldozed. So he discussed it with president Don Stewart and agreed to refund the \$25 fine. It was the only successful baseball strike in history that I have ever known.

There was another strike that season that wasn't successful; the time I got struck on the head. Strangely enough, I have MacPhail to thank for not being seriously injured that night in Fort Worth. The helmet had been a MacPhail major league innovation and I started to use it the short time I was in the Cub camp. There was only one on the Tulsa club and it was owned by an outfielder named Goober Crawford, who once had been hit on the head. I used to borrow it every time I went to bat and had it on when I faced Fort Worth pitcher Bear Tracks Greer for the third time in the final inning of a 1-0 game.

I had rapped him for a triple and a double and he wasn't too glad to see me step up with one out in the ninth, a man on first and Fort Worth leading, on one hit. With the count 0 and 2, he obviously figured he could waste one and what better way than the accepted practice of brushing the hitter back with a tight one. As the ball left his hand, I lost it in the lights. I caught it on the left temple, right on the protective sponge. I hit the dirt through instinct but wasn't hurt, fortunately, except for a slight bruise caused by the force of the pitch. The helmet makers got a nice order from our owner because of the incident.

I hit .276 that season, which was pretty good when you consider that it was a tough league in which only a dozen guys went over .300 and there were such averages as .211 for Zarilla, .256 for Whitey Plat and .257 for Eddie Kazak. We missed the playoffs and I was recalled by the Cubs. When I reported to them, they had almost the full month of September left to play. Wilson put me into my first major league game against Cincinnati in a Labor Day doubleheader, as soon as I arrived.

I replaced Stan Hack at third and faced the great Johnny Vander Meer when he was throwing bullets. I hit seventh; that is, I batted seventh. I really was scared on my first turn at bat. Vandy threw me three pitches, one higher than the other. I swung blindly at 'em all, everyone of which was a sure ball. When I walked back to the bench a beaten kid, the great Jimmy Foxx took me aside. He told me not to worry, since Vander Meer had an annoying habit of even striking out the big guys. He assured me that I could hit Vander Meer and suggested that I take a couple of pitches, instead of swinging wildly at everything thrown. He advised me that Johnny usually tossed the curveball when in a spot, and, in case I came up in a situation like that, to look into the dugout and he would give me the curveball signal.

Sure enough, the situation arose on my next turn at bat. Bill Nicholson was on third and Vander Meer missed his first two pitches. I looked over at Foxx and got the curve signal. I was ready when Vander Meer threw it, slicing a single to right that not only knocked in Nicholson but also kayoed my jitters. I never was nervous after that, and I rapped Vandy for a double off the left-centerfield wall the next time up. I'll never forget Jimmy Foxx for helping me.

Pitcher Hi Bithorn became my roomie. I played every day and did very well. Hack, who had indicated he was going to retire, apparently lost his job — I hoped. There was a hot pennant race that year. Brooklyn and St. Louis went right down to the wire in a dogfight. Judge Landis issued an order that, because of the tight flag battle, no rookies could be used in games with the Dodgers and Cards. I missed five games because of the edict and one was a heart-breaker for me. I was barred from playing against the Dodgers in Ebbets Field. I not only was broken up over being deprived of playing in my home town but I was also out \$58 for tickets I had purchased so that my friends could see me. I finished with a .364 mark for 12 games. When I left Chicago that September, Wilson told me that Hack had notified him he was retiring and the third base job was mine. There was nothing that could stop me now. Well, almost nothing. That Winter, I enlisted in the Coast Guard. I spent three years in the service and, in the meantime, Hack had to come out of retirement in 1942 because the Cubs had nobody to play third. I was on the U.S. Monticello in September, 1945, preparing to carry a load of prisoners to Italy, when I learned that I was to receive my discharge from the Coast Guard.

CHAPTER 8: MY FIRST AND ONLY WORLD SERIES

On Sept. 13, 1945 I became a civilian again. Naturally, I was itching to get back to the Cubs, who were battling the Cards for the pennant. Prior to my discharge, Commissioner Happy Chandler had announced that servicemen released before Sept. 27, would be eligible for the World Series. So, as I headed for St. Louis to rejoin the Cubs, I dreamed of my \$4,000 Series share. I wasn't the only one in that boat. Bithorn and Clyde McCullough also had been discharged and we returned to the Cubs about the same time. They, too, were anxious to see some good money after a few years of taking petty cash from Uncle Sam. Charley Grimm was managing then and he didn't use Bithorn, McCullough or me down the stretch. We beat out the Cards and got into the Series against Detroit. And, in anticipation of a healthy Series check, I splurged.

I had my wife, Harriet, whom I had married in 1943 while in service, come to Chicago for the Series. My total expenses ran to \$230, which included tickets for some of my former Coast Guard buddies. I thought nothing of it, since all I could see was the vision of that nice World Series cut. It turned out to be just a vision, though. For, when I received my check that December, I discovered that my teammates had voted me, as well as Bithorn and McCullough, a \$250 share. After deducted taxes made it \$190, it wound up costing me \$40 to play in the World Series.

That \$250 was my actual pay for seven World Series games, in which I appeared in only one as a pinch-runner, because your contractual salary ends on the final day of the season. I was happy about making the Series but disgusted with Chandler over the money. I felt that McCullough, Bithorn and I should have been taken care of by someone. The Cubs had been nice to us by handing each returning serviceman \$500 and, therefore, they were absolved of any Series obligation in my eyes. But when the players voted the batboy \$982.50 and three returning servicemen \$250 each, I thought that Chandler should have done something about it. He ought to have made some provisions for returning servicemen who were Series eligibles to get full cuts. I believed he was more responsible than my teammates. He had publicly adopted the servicemen in making them eligible for the World Series in a last-second. announcement. I, and I guess the rest of the Cubs, figured it was up to him to handle the matter entirely; in other words, to make sure that the servicemen got their full Series share, too. But Chandler didn't.

My enthusiasm for playing ball had completely drowned the incident by the time the Cubs sent me a \$4,000 contract that I signed quicker than you could say Cy Block. I had only hopes of a utility job, when I went back to Catalina Island in February, 1946, because Hack had a great year in 1945 and I was rusty as were all the ex-GIs. The place was jumping with returned servicemen and I soon got word that I was being shipped to Los Angeles in the Pacific Coast League at the same salary.

The Pacific Coast League — the paradise of the minor leagues, where everyone hits .300 and all the pitchers win 20 games. And Los Angeles which, with Hollywood, was the glamour center of the baseball world. Right smack in the heart of the movie colony, everybody is a rabid fan, from Bing Crosby down to Lassie. Our manager was Bill Sweeney, a landmark in the Coast League and a personal favorite of most of the film stars. It was nothing to see a guy like Dennis Morgan, for instance, shagging flies during his off-the-set hours; and he was pretty good, too. On Sundays, the place was a who's

who of movie stars and a good majority of the fans would turn out to see Clark Gable, Ginger Rogers, Tony Martin, Joe E. Brown, Crosby, etc.

There was a good segment, however, which came to see our Broadway Bill Schuster. The guy was a panic. He was a good shortstop but a better comedian. You never knew what to expect from him. One day, he rapped back to the box and, instead of tearing for first, he raced for the mound and slid right under pitcher Kewpee Barrett. Another time, he smashed a liner on which the fielder made a great catch, whereupon he raced into the stands, plopped into a seat and joined the crowd in applauding the play. Another of his favorite tricks was to drop a sacrifice but towards the first baseman and then retreat before the tag, finally turning and sliding into the plate.

One of the funniest stunts he ever pulled was in the majors with the Cubs. It was soon after Chicago sent Jimmy Foxx to the Phillies that the incident occurred. Schuster was a cutie with the hidden ball trick; one of the best at it. Foxx had smashed a double and taken a lead off second when he saw Schuster standing between him and the bag, flaunting the ball with a grin on his face. The embarrassed Foxx glared at Bill and threatened: "If you tag me out, I'll kill you!" Schuster looked at the huge slugger, made a quick tag, dropped the ball and sped for his life to the dugout, as the puzzled fans looked on in bewilderment.

The Pacific Coast League was the first league, other than the majors, of course, where I could shower and dress in a clubhouse. The living standards in the circuit were the best in AA ball. Because of the longer season, which starts three weeks prior to all leagues in baseball, there were bigger salaries. Traveling conditions were excellent, particularly because you stayed in a city one week at a time, whereas in other leagues, it was for two or three days only. At Los Angeles we had an ideal home schedule. We would play a Wednesday afternoon doubleheader, Thursday and Friday night games, a single game on Saturday afternoon, a double on Sunday afternoon and be off Monday and Tuesday. A fellow could last a thousand years under those conditions, and some of the players seemed to. I had a rough start. As soon as the three-year service rust began to wear off, I started to come on. But, just as I was getting into top shape, I suffered one of those severe leg muscle pulls that was so common among returning servicemen that year. I was out six weeks and, in the meantime, the Cubs sent down Albie Glossop to replace me and he went great guns. Advised by a doctor that warm climate would help my leg, and also itching to play everyday, I asked to be shipped away from that paradise. Nashville of the Southern Association was my next stop.

CHAPTER 9: LARRY GILBERT — SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION — GIANT AMONG MEN

I joined the Vols the end of June, under my Cub salary terms, and right after I got off the plane, I was in a ball game that same night. I went from one character — Schuster — to another character — The Mad Monk. The Mad Monk, of course, was Russ Meyer. There was only one man in baseball who knew how to handle him. That was Larry Gilbert, president, general manager, manager and part-owner of Nashville. Almost every unmanageable character in baseball seemed to wind up with Gilbert and he would convert them with a golden touch. Unpredictable guys like Boots Poffenberger and Greek George were meat in his talented hands. He treated everyone like a son; probably because

he had three sons, the late Larry, Jr., Charley and Tookie, in organized ball and believed in handling players like he wanted his sons handled. If you were in debt, he would bail you out. He paid all the hospital bills for one of the players' wives. When Harriet gave birth to our daughter, Bette, in 1947 he gave me an extra \$1,000. At the end of the season, he would take some of the boys who were making \$300-\$400 a month and give them a \$500 bonus. He was one of the few men in baseball who voluntarily gave a player a percentage of his sale price. He's a great man and even a greater manager. He was the kind of fellow any player would break his back to play for.

Gilbert brought out the best in everyone. He brought Monk Meyer along until he was the best pitcher in the league at the end of the season. Gilbert tactfully told the Mad Monk that he would tolerate his clubhouse wrecking but not his wild field antics, which included cussing everyone in sight and tossing buckets, towels and equipment around the dugout in frequent outbursts of temper. Under Larry's skillful touch, the frisky Meyer blew off steam in the direction of the opposition. And under Gilbert's considerate managing, I regained my touch.

They never got me out. I hit over .400 until August and gradually leveled off to finish with .351. We came from sixth place, with The Mad Monk winning regularly every fourth day, only to lose a playoff berth in our final game. The Mad Monk, who always gave everything, broke down and cried as the game ended. But it wasn't all tragic. There was the game we played in Mobile, Alabama, for example. We had a little center fielder named Pete Thomassie, who was Meyer's roomie and buddy. He could really go and get 'em. And he had to when a Mobile batter caught hold of a Meyer pitch and soared it towards the fence in right center. We were leading, 3-2, and Mobile had men on first and second as Thomassie raced for the fly. He made a leaping, back-handed stab of the ball and instinctively put out his bare left hand to protect himself from the fence.

I ran out for the relay but there was none. Thomassie seemed to be leaning against the fence. In the meantime, the two Mobile runners were tearing around and Meyer was screaming at his pal. I went all the way out to the fence from my second base position, grabbed the ball out of Pete's glove and tossed it in. The man on second scored and the other went to second. And there was Thomassie still leaning against the fence and yelling: "Mah Anger! Mah finger!" When we got to him, there he was with his index finger jammed into a crack in the fence. As mad as The Mad Monk was, even he had to laugh.

Then there was the game we played in Little Rock, Arkansas. It was only 108 degrees that Sunday afternoon and steam really was coming out of the ground. That was the day Mickey Rocco picked to join us, having been shipped down from Cleveland in exchange for our first baseman, Heinz Becker. He first balked at the deal, finally reporting after 22 days. He soon was sorry he ever reported. He got through the 14-inning first game okay but, in his first time at bat in the nightcap, he never knew what hit him. As the pitcher went into his rocking motion, Rocco just collapsed at the plate and passed out from the heat. When brought to, he got the day off and was plenty happy about it.

At the end of the season, Gilbert told me that I was to report to the Cubs next Spring. Just as I was preparing to leave for home, though, he said that the Cubs wanted me to join them immediately with Meyer. We took a plane from Nashville and headed for New York. However, with LaGuardia Field fog-bound, the pilot swung back and let us off at Philadelphia. We decided not to waste any time in Philly because I was anxious to get to

New York and see Harriet for the first time in three months.

The Mad Monk hailed a cab. I figured, of course, we were going to the railroad station. I almost dropped dead when Meyer told the driver to take us to New York; and so did the driver. After the hackie received permission from the starter for the 90-mile trip, we were off; and you can say that again. Three hours and \$25 later, we pulled up to my Brooklyn apartment. The next day, the Philly papers carried stories about two drunken ball players taking a cab to New York.

We picked up the Cubs, who had been rained out in Boston, back in Philadelphia two days later. I played in three games and pinch-hit in two more. I finally got to play in Ebbets Field, going 1-for-4 against Joe Hatten. But I really blew a chance that might have cemented a permanent major league job for me. I got the opportunity in the last game of the 1946 season.

The Dodgers and Cards had entered the final day tied for the lead and Brooklyn, because of the one hour difference in time, already had its victory posted on the Wrigley Field scoreboard. Harry "The Cat" Brecheen was protecting a 1-0 lead when Bill Nicholson led off the last of the ninth for us with a single. Billy Jurgens sacrificed him to second and Grimm sent me in to pinch-hit for Len Merullo. The first pitch Brecheen threw was a screwball that didn't break. I was cutting right from the start, realizing this was a once-in-a-lifetime spot. When I hit the ball, I knew this was it. Instead of running to first, I remained rooted near the plate watching the flight of the ball. It looked like a sure game-winning homer but Harry "The Hat" Walker climbed the left-centerfield wall and pulled it down. That saved the Cards and sent them into a playoff against the Dodgers which they eventually won. It was a tough break for me that unquestionably cost plenty, for if I had hit that dramatic homer, the publicity alone probably would have assured me of a big league job for years.

I was given a \$1,000 raise from the Cubs in my 1947 contract, anyway, with the promise of another \$1,000 if I remained past the cutting deadline. When I reached Catalina, Hack, who appeared to be getting younger while I got older, was still around. He was an amazing ball player. I had been trying to break into the lineup since 1942. It was now 1947. I had been to Church, and to Temple, asking the good Lord for a simple finger fracture to Hack; but no luck. I was even taking showers with him and dropping soap all over the shower floor, perhaps he would slip and sprain an ankle. But no luck; Stan Hack one of the all time greats played his 151 games per year and my exercise in the ball games amounted to me sliding up and down the bench. At least I didn't have to pay to get into the ball park.

After spring training we left for Chicago to play our annual series with the Chicago White Sox. Upon arrival at the ball park I picked up a scorecard and failed to find my name on it. I wasn't too stupid not to realize it was an indication that the Cubs had no intention of keeping me and probably were trying to get waivers. They apparently had some difficulty getting me out of the majors, because when we opened the season in St. Louis, I still was on the roster. The season was about two weeks old when Grimm finally notified me I was being shipped outright to Nashville.

I immediately went to Gallagher. I told him that it seemed ridiculous to me that I must go back to a league in which I had just proven myself with a .351 average. I pleaded for a chance, even offering to pitch batting practice or act as a batboy. I pointed out that it

seemed strange that the Cubs had to rely on outfielders like Andy Pafko and Peanuts Lowrey as Hack's third base relief when I had experience at the position. Gallagher's answer was that he simply could do nothing about it as Charlie Grimm was running the ball club and the best thing for me to do was to report to Nashville.

I didn't think it was the best thing for me to do, and I told Gallagher so. I added that I thought I could play in the big leagues and there might be some team that could use me. I told him I was going home. And I did, without pay. It was roughs because Harriet was pregnant at that time and I had only about \$500 in the bank. I didn't know what I was going to do, except that I was determined not to go to Nashville.

So I went to Nashville. But not before I sat it out, without pay, for a month. I didn't remain idle, though. Three days after I arrived home, I received a telegram from Larry Gilbert. Typical of his sincere desire to help players, he gave me permission to make a major league deal for myself, providing he got a satisfactory player in return. He even went to the trouble of contacting the Giants and Phillies about me. I, in turn, sent wires to the Phillies, Red Sox, Braves, Browns, Senators and Pirates.

I had surveyed the field and figured those were the clubs that could use a third baseman.

I received an immediate reply from Herb Pennock, former great Yankee hurler and then general manager of the Phillies. He advised me to call him collect, which I did, instantly. Pennock expressed surprise that the Cubs had even waived me out of the league, which is not unusual since it is a routine major league practice for teams to put whole rosters on the waiver list in order to sneak out some ballplayers. He told me to sit tight. He was going to talk with manager Ben Chapman and attempt to swing the deal in two or three days. In fact, he even suggested I have my bags packed, so certain he was that he could get me.

A few hours later, I had a call from Roy Harney, Pittsburgh general manager. He told me that he wasn't sure whether he could use me in Pittsburgh right away but he was interested in my playing with his Indianapolis farm club, then being managed by Al Lopez. I was in the market for a job, thus, I played both ends against the middle. I told him I was interested and suggested he contact Jim Gallagher and the Cubs.

Although the Cubs had released me outright, and I had Nashville's permission to negotiate a deal, I still was Chicago property under the farm system setup and, therefore, had to refer prospective buyers to Gallagher. In the meantime, the Red Sox, Braves and Browns advised me they had no place on their rosters for me. I never heard from the Senators but, at the end of the 1947 season, I met Junior Wooten and Gil Coan, outfielders with the Nats, and they told me they had recommended me to manager Ossie Bluege, who, in turn, advised Clark Griffith he could use me. Nothing came of it, though. The day after I had spoken to Pennock, he called me again, from Philadelphia. He said he had talked to Chicago and then quietly suggested that I go back to Nashville and have a good year. A couple of hours later, Harney called. He told me that the Cubs wouldn't deal for me and said that he would be in town in a couple of days and I should drop into his hotel. I was puzzled. I couldn't understand why a team like Chicago, which didn't want me, would not trade me. Harney didn't enlighten me much when I visited him. He did tell me, however, that he had offered infielder Vic Barnhart on option to Nashville and cash for my contract but the Cubs turned him down. He thought I should see Gallagher and

attempt to swing the deal myself. I immediately did because Gallagher was three floors below Harney in the Commodore Hotel. I told Gallagher exactly what Harney had said and he answered that someone was pulling my leg since nobody had made any offers for my contract.

I, naturally, suggested that he get on the phone and call upstairs to Harney in my presence. He said baseball didn't do business that way and then added that I was wasting my time and I should go back to Nashville because nobody wanted me.

"Nobody wants me?" I fairly shouted. "Nobody wants me? I'm no good. I hit .350 with the same club last year that you're trying to send me to now. I've hit .300 in every season but one. I've hustled and broken my back to get a chance in the majors. And you tell me that nobody wants me. Well, if I'm that worthless, give me my release."

Gallagher rejected my offer. He said the Cubs had an investment in me. I couldn't figure it out. I was worthless to the Cubs and I wasn't. I told him I wasn't reporting to Nashville and he answered that if I didn't, I was through with baseball.

I almost was as low as my bank account when I got home. I didn't know where to turn. I considered going to Happy Chandler, but two things mitigated against doing so: (1) my knowledge of the baseball commissioner was strictly newspaper stuff, which painted him as a politician, and I couldn't figure out whether he was an owners' or players' man, and (2) even if he ruled in my favor, I was afraid he owners would blackball me, anyway. Despite all my troubles, I still had a fiercely burning desire to play baseball. And, since I was twenty-seven, I knew I didn't have much more time left to prove I could. Instead of going to Chandler, therefore, I decided to have a talk with Ford Frick, then President of the National League. I had met him and knew he was an old newspaperman with courage; and this was a situation that called for someone with more courage than I had to buck baseball. I put my cards on the table with Frick and he told me he wanted to check my story. He called Harney and Pennock and they confirmed what I had said. He then phoned Gallagher in my presence. I couldn't tell from the conversation what passed between them but the verdict was Nashville or no baseball.

I sat it out for about another two weeks, while Nashville showered me with wired suspension threats. They finally suspended me "without pay." It was serious but Harriet and I laughed at the "without pay" statement because I hadn't been getting a cent all along. When my bankroll hit rock bottom, however, so did my resistance. I called Gilbert in Nashville and he immediately reinstated me with salary retroactive to opening day.

In addition, when I reported to Nashville, Gilbert phoned the Cubs about their payment-share of my salary. The total amount of money due from the Cubs, from the time they released me until the time I reported to Nashville, was \$1100. Gallagher asked to talk to me. He inquired as to whether I expected the Cubs to pay me money when I voluntarily had refused to play. I told him that I didn't expect the money but would like to have it because my wife was pregnant and we sure could use it. He said that if I had a good year with Nashville, he would see that I was reimbursed.

Gallagher, always true to his word, produced after I hit .364, second only to Ted Kluszewski's .371. Graduated to the majors from that Nashville club were Hank Schenz, Hal Jeffcoat. Rube Walker and Bob Rush, but no Cy Block. Here I had one of the finest seasons conceivable and still nobody wanted me, so they said. On the final day, I

dislocated my left thumb and went into the play-offs practically unable to grip a bat. We played five games against New Orleans and six games in the final against Mobile. I couldn't swing a stick without severe pain and, after going 0-for-8 in the first two games, I decided to bunt 'em. I must have set some kind of an all-time record because I beat out seven in the remaining nine games, dropping three safely in one game.

All that my fine batting average, which was 16 points higher than my nearest teammate's, and hustle got me was a Triple A shot in 1948 with Buffalo of the International League. And I probably would not have gotten that if it weren't for Gilbert's unmatched generosity. I had told him that there was no other guy in baseball for whom I would prefer to play, but I explained that I would like to play near home, for a change, where I could spend some time with Harriet and my new daughter. As always, he came through.

When sold to Buffalo, I was carrying my \$5,000 Cub contract, which Nashville and Chicago had shared in 1947. The Bisons offered me a \$600-a-month or the equivalent of \$2900. I returned it with an explanation of my Cub contract. I then received a new offer of \$800-a-month or \$3600 for the season. We finally compromised at \$4500 after manager Paul Richards had called me from his Waxahachie, Texas home.

So I reported to Buffalo, where it seems to always snow or rain in the Spring. Richards apparently couldn't tell the difference. He ran his pitchers under the stands when it rained and outside when it snowed. I believed that if it snowed hard enough, he would have put snowshoes on his hurlers. He was a firm advocate of conditioning, particularly for the pitchers. It got so that the rest of the club, which continuously worked out until tongues dragged, felt sorry for the twirlers.

This would have paid off in the pennant. I'm sure, if we didn't get hit with a series of tough breaks. First we lost Chet Laabs, who had smashed 29 homers and had 81 RBIs early in July, with bone chips in his right thumb. Anse Moore, second in homers and another big RBI man, also went out for the season within a week of Laabs because of a sacroiliac condition. Then Johnny Groth smashed a screaming shot towards third, where I was a base runner, and it hit me in the right shinbone and sidelined me for a month with blood-poisoning. We finished the season with pitchers like Saul Rogovin playing the outfield and we slid from a half game off the top to sixth place.

That Rogovin was a scream. He's a somnambulist and he almost drove Joe Ginsberg crazy in our Waxahachie Spring training camp. Joe was assigned as Roggy's roomie but knew nothing about the sleep-walking. One night, Ginsberg awoke to find Big Hook standing over him with his big hooks extended as though he was intent on strangling. Ginsberg grabbed a shoe and screamed. "If you make a move. I'll let you have it!"

Roggy didn't bat an eyelash. He stood rooted for a few seconds and then quietly slipped back into his bed. The next night, after we had told the scared Ginsberg about Roggy's habit, he opened wide the windows Saul insists on locking for safety reasons and declared: "If the so-and-so starts walking tonight, let him go right out the window!"

I almost received my last shot at a Major League job in 1949. Call it fate but at the start of the 1949 season with Buffalo I was red hot. The baseball looked as big as a watermelon and the pitchers couldn't get me out. The first two weeks of the season I was hitting well over .350. In a seven game series with Jersey City and Newark I went 13-for-

22 and after the last game ended in Newark, Paul Richards, the manager, called me to his room. He told me that the New York Giants had been following me, as Leo Durocher needed a right-handed pinch-hitter and utility infielder for the season. Richards said he had made a tentative deal with the Giants but was holding off for a week or ten days until he could get a replacement infielder for me. Meanwhile he replaced me at third base with Gene Markland until the deal was closed. Two weeks went by and then one day I read in the papers that Bert Haas, right-hand hitter and reserve infielder was purchased by the Giants.

What happened I don't know but not only did I not go up to the Major Leagues but I couldn't even get back to the Buffalo line-up as Markland was hitting over .400.

It took me six weeks to get back into the Buffalo line-up for the 1949 pennant race.

In 1949, after a most miserable season in which I hit .270, I signed another Buffalo contract calling for the same salary. In the meantime, I knew that I wasn't getting any younger. I still hadn't really made the majors and it was about time I thought of securing a job with a future. Special aptitude tests showed that I was suited for insurance-underwriting, so I acquired a position with the Nashem Agency of the Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company. It was with a feeling of some security, for the first time in my life, that I returned to baseball with Buffalo.

We gave Buffalo its first pennant in thirteen years and Buffalo gave us a reception that major league cities could hardly match. I was with the Cubs when we returned home from Pittsburgh, after clinching the 1945 pennant, and saw the club greeted by about seven thousand fans. We returned to Buffalo, after sewing up the flag in Montreal, at midnight and were greeted by 40,000. Yes, the streets in the middle of the night. They met us at the station and paraded us through the streets in a sixteen-car motorcade.

There we were, Ray Coleman, Luis Aloma, Bob Hooper, Billy DeMars, Jake Wade, Gene Markland, Doc Cramer, Coaker Triplett, Ben Warren, Lonnie Frey, Luman Harris, Len Okrie, Rogovin and myself being greeted as though we were General Mac Arthurs. Buffalo proved to me that it was one of the hottest baseball towns in the minors. The beautiful ball park, one of the minors' finest, reflected the high-class calibre of the franchise. It needed only a double deck to rival any major league stadium.

We were one of the surprises of organized baseball that year. We had generally been picked to finish seventh and we won the flag by four games. Richards contributed the most. He was another Larry Gilbert in his treatment of players;. He would put out just a little bit more for them and, consequently, vice versa. It wasn't uncommon for instance, for Richards to pick up a team check for steak dinners, even though we had been paid our meal money; which is a rarity even in the majors. He would think of such little things as personally buying a case of beer for us after a tough doubleheader, taking groups of players to the movies with him at his expense and picking up checks at all times if you were with him.

He was a player's manager. Yet, as considerate as he always was, he could be tough, too. Once we lost a twin-bill to Jersey City and, after everyone left the park, we had batting practice from 7:15 to 8:30. When we slumped, he would have us out every morning working on our faults, even though we had night games scheduled. Richards believed in giving everyone a chance. He didn't want anyone on his bench who wasn't

mentally or physically prepared to play. And he used everybody by employing the righty-lefty two platoon system. I played third against lefties and Frey worked against righties. I hit .277 during the regular season and got red-hot in the playoffs, when I rapped .692 by going 13-for-9.

In 1949 after Buffalo won the pennant, I was offered a contract to play winter baseball for Aquadilla, in Puerto Rico.

Winter Baseball was a tremendous deal for minor league players, as there were the Havana Leagues, the South American Baseball League, and the Puerto Rican winter league.

The season ran from October 1, until March the first, a period of five months. The ball players averaged between \$800 and \$1200 a month including room and board and transportation. The games were played Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. The teams in the league were San Juan, Caguas, Ponce, Santurce, Mayaguez, and Aquadilla. Each team was permitted to have five stateside players and the balance of the team had to be composed of Native players. Each team carried 20 players 15 natives, 5 stateside players.

On my team, we had myself, Johnny Logan, shortstop; Les Fusselman, catcher; Jack Smith, pitcher; and Hank Perry, pitcher. I found out that the Puerto Ricans were fanatic baseball fans, and went wild over the ball players as they do in Japan today. Joe DiMaggio in his best day was never more popular than the stateside players in Puerto Rico.

I lived in a beautiful Hasciende called the Boringuen Country Club, and was assigned a valet and chauffer, called Donato. There I was living in the lap of luxury. My first game was against San Juan, and there were about 14,000 people watching a night game. In the first inning with 2 out and 2 on I hit a home run over the fence off Sad Sam Jones who was the San Juan pitcher, and when I got to home plate, they carried me off the field. The fans went wild. Playing baseball in the Puerto Rican winter league was marvelous; as the people were wonderful and I enjoyed playing for Aquadilla. Our team was owned by eleven professional men who were rabid baseball fans and never missed a game. We had a young ball club that made a lot of mistakes and as a result, after three weeks of winning about three games, and losing nine, they fired the manager, and asked me to take over the ball club. Dr. Marquez, a very fine physician, in Aguadilla, was president of the baseball club and put me in full charge.

I immediately asked permission to return to the states to bring back some stateside ball players, that I felt would help the ball club and flew back to New York to contact Lou Limmer, first baseman, left handed hitter with tremendous power; Earl Naylor, former outfielder with the Philadelphia Phillies, and Mickey Rutner, former Red Sox second baseman.

With these three hustling ball players, I felt we could really help the ball club, and produce a wonderful team. Lou Limmer, hit well over 25 home runs and became a favorite in the islands. One of the wonderful memories about the people in Puerto Rico, is that any pitcher, who pitched a no hitter received \$1,000, and any ball player who won a very important game was paraded in his uniform out of the stands to the local theatre and presented to the fans. He received anywhere from \$100 to \$500 extra. This happened to

Lou Limmer at his first series in San Juan. It was quite a sight to see. Lou leaving the ballpark in full uniform and walking up the stage of the theatre to be presented to the fans. Lou Limmer's nickname in the league was La Cara de Pecora, my nick-name was Don Jose Blocke El Dirigente De Aguadilla Tiborines.

The strange twist of fate in this league was that Earl Naylor who was supposed to be my home run hitter, couldn't buy a base hit, and I used him as a pitcher and he became one of the best pitchers in the league.

Mickey Rutner, played a tremendous second base and teamed up with Johnny Logan to form one of the best double play combinations in the league. Mickey hit well over .300.

We traveled by three cars all over the island.

My only problem was conversing with the players, as I couldn't speak Spanish and therefore, hired myself an interpreter. It wasn't until near the end of the season that I discovered the interpreter was trying to get my job so I really never knew what he told my players. Some of my players reached the major leagues, and became stars. Johnny Logan, short stop, the Pirates; Olivo, left hand pitcher from Santo Domingo to Cincinnati.

As a ball player, I finished the season hitting well over .350, but as a team we finished a dismal last.

My fondest memories of Aguadilla is after a ball game. Whether we won or we lost, all the people in the town would be sitting around the town square re-playing the game and seeing Dr. Marquez and the Ferrerer Bros, replaying the game to change a loss to the victory column.

The year 1949, in the Winter Baseball League was one of the most wonderful experiences of my life.

When I went home, I thought I had a good chance of being drafted into the majors. But in the Spring of 1950, the only one I heard from was Buffalo again. For the third straight year, the Bisons offered me the same salary. I left for the Avon Park, Fla. training base with Harriet and my daughter, Bette, just about convinced that the major leagues would never have me. I realized I would be better off concentrating on insurance but I still had the strong desire to play baseball, particularly under the ideal conditions offered by Buffalo. I couldn't tell a player without a scorecard when I got to camp. The Youth Movement had set in. Aloma, Hooper, Rogovin, Coleman, DeMars, Markland and Okrie had earned major league shots. Even Richards was gone, as he moved to Seattle. The only remaining members of the championship team, besides me, were Clem Hausmann, Ernie Silverman, Frank Trebock, Marty Tabacheck, Triplett and Wade. The new manager was Frank Skaff and he signified that, under a new working agreement with the Athletics, his job was to develop kids.

What a season that was. We went from first to last and would have dropped out of the league if it were possible. I'd bet they couldn't put together a team worse than that 1950 Buffalo outfit if they tried. Where we had an outfield that hit 83 homers in 1949, our rookie sensations wound up with a grand total of seven. They sacrificed the club actually to develop one potential major leaguer — a pitcher named Harold Wood, who

immediately went into the service. The rest were deadwood. We not only lost 97 of 153 games, but also 300,000 of the 390,000 fans who had watched us win a pennant the previous season.

I played ninety-four games that year and hit .300, Twice I broke up no-hitters while pinch-hitting. Once Jim Prendergast of Syracuse had two out in the last inning when I swung for the pitcher and singled to center. Then, six weeks later, George Copeland of Rochester had a no-hitter going into the final out when I batted for the pitcher again, and singled past third. This gave me a no-hit wrecking total of three for my career, since I ruined another in the Cotton States League. In addition, I once got two of the three hits that Vander Meer allowed the Cubs one day.

The following Spring, it was Avon Park, Fla. again for me. I was resigned to playing with Buffalo by this time and had entirely given up hope of ever returning to the majors. The Youth Movement still was rolling when I reported to the third new starting manager in three seasons — George Torporcer. He concentrated on the kids but it didn't bother me. I thought it was the usual routine; let the kids break their backs and I would be in there when the bell rang. But when it rang, it was to be the end of the fight, not the start.

It was the day before we were breaking camp. Everybody was crowding around the new shipment of bats that had just arrived. I didn't see any of mine. I had been around long enough to know what the score was, so I figured something was up, Torporcer gave it to me straight, which is unusual for a manager. He told me that he planned to use youngsters and the club couldn't see paying me my big salary, which was \$4,500, to sit on the bench. He said he would let me know, in a day or so, about the disposition of my contract.

The day of my eighth wedding anniversary, April 8, I was called to the room of Leo Miller, general manager of the Buffalo club. With Torporcer at his side, he told me that he could have sold me to a lower league but, considering my services rendered to Buffalo and baseball, he preferred to allow me to make a deal for myself and possibly get a bonus. So he handed me that yellow, square piece of paper. It was my outright release. All that was left of 14 years in organized baseball.

As I sat in my hotel room shortly thereafter and reflected on those 14 years, I realized I had come to another fork in the road of my career. Once again I had to make an important decision but this was the big one.

It was then that I recalled my mother's words: "Don't be a baseball bum."

That did it. I made up my mind to quit. There was no amount of money that could change my mind. Minor league clubs came through with attractive offers, like a \$1500 bonus plus my Buffalo salary, but I was through. I had had enough. I had learned my lesson. It was time to get to work and stop dreaming.

So I quit with just one conviction — if I had it to do all over again, I would do the same thing, except this time I would work twice as hard to reach the Major Leagues. Because all I ever wanted was to play baseball.