



By Margaret Evans, Editor

I'd like to say a few words about baseball.

Shocked you, didn't I? I never write about sports. Come to think of it, I never say "a few words," either.

But since everybody's been busy memorializing the greatest practitioner of a sport I don't get *at all* – boxing – I thought I'd tip my hat to one that I do, just to stay in the general vicinity of the national zeitgeist.

Plus, it's summer. What's more summery than baseball?

My family and I spent most of Memorial Day in the car – driving to Atlanta that morning, then back to Beaufort that night. (Yes, really.) But in between road trips, we spent some quality time at Turner Field watching the Braves beat the Giants.

We thought we'd be watching the Giants beat the Braves. Everybody did, in fact, and as you might imagine, the Braves fans were wild with joy at this reversal of expectations.

Unfortunately, we are Giants fans.

Y'all know I'm in a mixed marriage, right? Alabama/California? It's an ongoing trial – lots of cultural compromises and personal sacrifices. For the sake of familial peace, I long ago submerged my longtime Braves devotion, taking Jeff's Giants along with his name.

It wasn't that difficult, really, because I don't care that much about baseball. Jeff does. *Oh, does he ever.*

So this was an easy choice, made even easier the first time he took me to a game at AT&T Park in San Francisco. His unadulterated boyish enthusiasm was irresistible – and the Giants were dazzling! – and I've been hooked ever since.

Well, not *hooked*, exactly. More like hooked-*ish*. Hooked would describe my husband, who falls asleep (or doesn't) on the sofa most nights during baseball season, listening to the Giants games that don't start till 10 pm ET. He has some app on his phone that connects him to their radio coverage.

Jeff says baseball is a game made for radio. I think he'd actually rather listen than watch, but that's a close call. You'd have to ask him.

We try to take in a game whenever we're out west visiting relatives, and it's always a spectacular treat. In fact, lots of my favorite family memories center around that baseball park in San Francisco. Years ago, we happened to be there on our daughter's birthday, and Jeff arranged for a surprise greeting to appear on the scoreboard: *Happy Birthday, Amelia. It's great you're eight!* This was the first time I'd ever seen my child cry tears of happiness. A mother remembers these things.

And just recently, over Spring Break, we met up with a passel of our California cousins to watch the Giants come from behind (by five runs!) to beat the pants off their great rivals, the LA Dodgers. We all went out for Italian food in the city afterwards. What a time we had!

One thing you can always count on at a Giants game is that it will be cold. No matter when you're there, it never fails – you need a jacket and scarf. Mark Twain once said, "The coldest winter I ever spent was a summer in San Francisco." Well, the coldest Giants game I ever attended was in July.

Our daughter's experience of live baseball has been limited to Giants games up until now. So she had a hard time, at first, adjusting to the atmosphere at Turner Field, where the late-May temperature approached 90 and her bare legs stuck to her seat. She was also disappointed that none of the walking vendors were selling churros, her favorite baseball snack (and mine), and we decided, sadly, that they must be a west coast thing.

But soon enough, my girl got into the spirit – she really loves the game! – and I discovered that enormous beers are much cheaper in Atlanta than San Francisco, so all was well. Fortunately, we found ourselves seated with a bunch of other Giants fans – our own little “enemy camp” – and we hooted and hollered with abandon. Amelia was proudly sporting her Buster Posey tee-shirt, and Jeff wore his trusty Giants cap. I, on the other hand, was consumed with mixed emotions and dueling allegiances. Every time the Braves fans launched into their trademark Tomahawk Chop – complete with the traditional warrior chant – I felt my hand twitching and secretly longed to join in. Old loyalties die hard.

(Which is probably why I was quietly, covertly pleased when the Braves claimed their unexpected victory. Shhhhh....)

By the way, how is it that the Braves are still getting away with this Tomahawk Chop business in the age of PC? Why hasn't somebody come along to spoil their fun? For that matter, why are they still allowed to call themselves the Braves?

But I digress. Another question – a mystery, almost – is why I, a woman typically uninterested in sports, like baseball so much. Why does anybody? It can be excruciatingly slow and uneventful for long stretches at a time. It lacks the breathless excitement of basketball, the brute thrill of football . . .

My husband puts it like this: “Some people think baseball is slow and boring. I think it unfolds at a stately pace that's perfect for summer.”

He makes a good point. Summer is the time to slow down, relax, chill. (Or burn, if you live here in the Lowcountry.) If you enjoy spending an afternoon at the beach doing absolutely

nothing, why not the ballpark?

Which is not to say that a baseball game is “absolutely nothing.” Far from it. In fact, if that’s how you feel about baseball, you just don’t know the game. According to my resident expert (hi, honey), baseball is far more complicated than meets the average eye. It’s a game of great subtlety and strategy that can be enjoyed on many levels, depending on the depth of one’s knowledge. In that way, baseball’s kind of like poetry, I guess. Or religion.

In fact, baseball Hall of Famer Leo Durocher once said, “Baseball is like church. Many attend; few understand.”

Mark me down as a pilgrim who’s still making progress. Luckily, for the purposes of this column, I have a “priest” in the house. In explaining his passion for baseball, Jeff touched on a paradox I’m not sure even *he* recognized. (His job is to know baseball; mine is to recognize paradoxes.) First, he mentioned the historical aspects of the sport; it dates back to 1781 and statistics have been recorded since the 1880s. Next, he waxed poetic about baseball’s “whimsical, unpredictable” nature, saying every ball park is different . . . that each has its own quirks, its own “personality”. . . that no two games are ever the same . . . that you never know how long a game will last . . . that each game has its own ineffable magic.

So baseball is a long-established, tradition-bound game of cold, hard stats that are strictly recorded, preserved and consulted . . . and also this inexpressible, ephemeral wonder that materializes in a ballpark near you – throwing off sparks and trailing fairy dust – then evaporates forever. Until next time.

If none of this is making sense to you, it’s time to watch *Field of Dreams* again.

And, of course, baseball is just so dang American. Everything about it screams red, white and blue. In fact, I’ve often said to my husband that AT&T Park is the only place in San Francisco that actually feels like America to me.

I haven’t been feeling so good about America, lately, so being at Turner Field on

Memorial Day was a gift – sort of a booster shot of patriotism. After this long, nasty election season, I truly needed it. Before the game started, a large contingent of men and women in uniform unfolded a massive American flag across the field, while the face of Ronald Reagan filled a giant screen and his words about freedom and sacrifice rang through the air. Then dueling buglers played a slow, aching Taps, and some blond country singer belted out the Star Spangled Banner.

“Dad, Mom’s crying again,” cracked my daughter, whose job at fourteen is to be perpetually embarrassed by me.

“I can’t help it,” I sniffed, donning my sunglasses. “I just love baseball.”