

## A Good Day

The cat and I awakened well before dawn, he wanting out and me looking for coffee. He had to wait for morning light while I found a clean cup into which I poured yesterday's leftover coffee before I let the microwave do its thing. He sat at attention, hopeful, while I slowly came to life. This has become our daily ritual, only today had a twist.

An hour later, the morning sun having risen high enough for the cat to wonder into the backyard, I plugged the treadmill cord into the nearby outlet, changed into treadmill running togs, found an hour-long podcast episode, pressed the treadmill start button, getting in the day's run.

The podcast episode finished just as I did, the harmonic convergence completed when I noticed the cat waiting patiently to come back in. Striding to his randomly chosen location for his long day's nap, he ignored my walking the other way to shower, leaving him alone to his day slumber. He never cares.

After having showered, soaped up, washed my scalp, shaved my face, dressed in the day's attire of shorts, long sanitary ball socks folded down to the ankle, the lightest summer shirt I own, my Giants ballcap in my hand, I kissed my wife adio for the day, headed out the door to the car. My parking pass and game ticket were on my cell phone. My wallet had the credit card of the day because the ballpark was cashless.

Came back in for my keys and walked out, expressing my love for my wife.

Came back in for my coffee thermos, expressing my affection for my wife.

Came back in for my sunscreen, expressing my devotion to my wife.

Came back in, just cuz. Kissed her goodbye, again, and I was on my way.

From where we live, we can drive to a day game, the morning of the game, in St. Louis, Cincinnati, and today, in Atlanta, and be home by dinner the same night. Usually. Absent a major traffic jam, I gave myself an extra 30 minutes, arriving to the parking spot, taking the shuttle, gaining entrance into the ballpark, and sliding into my seat just before first pitch. Good to have a plan, as long as the plan works out.

A truck meets car wreck ahead of me on the interstate slowed down the plan. A proof that coffee works rest area stop altered the timing. Having to scrub myself down with sunscreen before I stepped onto the shuttle from the parking lot to the ballpark eviscerated the plan (cannot take large sunscreen tube into the game). Missed the first inning.

Entering the main concourse, purchasing a gourmet cheeseburger with curly fries and summer shandy, locating my intended section above the first base bag, I found

my row and seat, only to be informed by those around me that my ticket showed I didn't have a ticket for Section 114 and that I should be in Section 14 down in front of me.

My seat was just nine rows from the field.

My seat was sundrenched on a 105-degree day.

My seat was in abundant heat.

My seat sucked.

Thinking to myself, "welcome to Hotlanta," I pulled my white baseball socks up to just below my knees, put my summer cooling arm covers over my wrists and up under my cooling short sleeved shirt, realized I didn't put sufficient sunscreen on my exposed knees, felt the perspiration begin to drain down from my shoulders, and settled in for a hot one. Had no reason to complain.

The game's score went from 1-1 after one inning to 6-1 in favor of the Braves after two innings, to 7-2 after six, 7-4 after 8 innings, with a worthless two out Giants home run finalizing the loss at 7-6. 162 games marks a full season; your team does not go undefeated. That said, my most ardent wish as a Giants fan is that the Dodgers go 0-162 every year. Haters gonna hate.

During the first three innings, the row I was in was empty. Then a father with his eight-year old son arrived, both in black shorts, black t-shirts, and black ballcaps, the dad holding his ice-cold water and his son's soda. Later on in the game, the son smartly refilled his soda bottle with cold water. He had learned about sitting endlessly in a hot sun on a still afternoon. Turns out it was the first time to a major league ballpark for either of them. Turned out they lived across the river from where I lived.

During the fourth inning, six large, overly-inked dudes, each carrying plastic bags filled with new ballcaps, handheld waterfilled, battery-operated fans, all with beards hanging at least three inches below their chins, took up residence in the seats to my left, each two-fisted, a light beer in each hand, water-saturated designer Braves towels covering their heads, and popcorn. Heavily buttered and salted popcorn is not the best of choices on a scorching overheated day, but I wasn't their parent. They had their employer's seats for the day, having just completed a steel laying project. They were happy.

During the seventh-inning stretch I did inquire as to whether the long, long beards were a pre-requisite to being hired by the company. The response, almost in unison, was that it wasn't, but if you worked for their company and the beard was deemed to short, they were sent to HR wherein the beard length was measured. I don't have a beard; I am not a big guy. We laughed in grand style, they lifting their beer cans

and me lifting my third large water bottle. Though I had the funds to pay for an endless supply of ice-cold water, the ballpark offered free refills of water into a soda or water bottle. Heroic decision.

The father and son team began asking serious baseball-related questions beginning in the sixth inning. Answering then as best I could, the father asked me how many major league games I'd attended in my lifetime. In the bottom of the eighth, I told him it had to be close to a 1,000 games, including postseason games. I'm older than I look, or so I think.

Despite the day's heat completely drenching my shirt, scorching my skin through the sunscreen, I was fascinated by the speed of the pitches and the ease in which the hitters not only followed the path of the pitch, but could time the swing to connect bat to ball, driving the pitch deep into the outfield. When you sit close to the field, the athleticism and ease in which these players conduct the game is artistic. So much to see on the field, every half inning.

Throughout the game, I noticed the ballpark was quietly filled with fans wearing Giants ballcaps, Giants t-shirts, Giants game jerseys, many with Giants World Series Patches embroidered on their regalia. My yearly game glances showed Giants fans scattered around the half-filled stadium. Late in the game, I realized how many of my people were in attendance because the Braves fans left early to beat the drivetime traffic, including the steelworkers. The Giants fans were all where they wanted to be. We travel well and we don't brag over it. I've attending Giants games on the road in Minneapolis, Boston, Chicago, Phoenix, Seattle, Denver, the Bronx, Queens, Anaheim, Baltimore, Oakland (sorta gotta do that one to be in the club), Philadelphia, as well as the current suspects of Atlanta, Cincinnati, and St. Louis. Many years, many Giants games. Different players, varied uniforms, but always the childlike happiness in seeing the Giants play in the correct attire.

During the game, I chatted with too many Giants fans to recall. On the way out of the ballpark, I spoke to one Giants fan who brought his adult sons. On the shuttle back to the parking lot, I engaged with another Giants fan who came along with his wife. Walking in the late afternoon heat to my car, I discussed seeing the Giants away from the City with a foursome who made Atlanta an annual pilgrimage.

Arriving back home, where I was safe, after a long haul through rush hour traffic from north of Atlanta to the Tennessee state line, followed by a long drive up the middle of the state, I let the day's clothing dry out, outside, and I showered away the day's heat. The cat found me, demanding a full account of the day. Dinner was magically awaiting me, along with a filled wineglass, and a kiss showing I was missed. It was a good day to be a Giants fan.