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My Father's Secret

It was the last day of my last trip to South Palm Beach.

I stood one final time on my father's beachfront balcony as the sun rose over the Atlantic. A seagull watched from his perch as the condo's maintenance man skimmed debris that had settled on the pool's surface overnight.

It was the last day of my last trip to South Palm Beach.

For the final time I walked a quarter-mile south on the beach to the Dune Deck Café, an outdoor breakfast-and-lunch place with a view of the water and the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. The hostess seated me and said, "No wife and daughter this morning?"

"They're packing. We're flying home today."

"Where do you live?"

"Near Boston."

"Do you come down here often?"

"For about a week every February to visit my father."

"Well, then, we'll look forward to seeing you next year."

"Yes," I said. "We'll be back next year." But I really wasn't sure.

It was the last day of my last trip to South Palm Beach.

And it was the last time I saw my father alive.

He was sitting on the sofa in his bathrobe when I returned to his condo. Once upon a time my father was taller and broader than me, but this was no longer so. He had been a widower for four years, and he was a withered husk: worn down by age, illness, and loneliness.

He said, "I need to tell you something very important." He spoke with the air-sucking rasp of a man bearing the weight of every one of his seventy-seven years. "I've discovered something I really want you to know."

I sat next to him. I waited to hear some essential truth: a pronouncement that would reveal the meanings of my life and our relationship, a key to unlock all the mysteries of the universe.

He continued. “After all these years, I finally discovered how to keep my underwear looking clean.”

He leaned forward and whispered his secret....

“Bleach.”

3 Large Street

We lived in a row house in the Oxford Circle neighborhood of Northeast Philadelphia. There were twenty-five connected houses on our side of Large Street. A block-long alley ran behind the homes. Across the alley were the back doors of twenty-five row houses on Kindred Street. And so fifty families shared that common area. In our neighborhood you never had to arrange a play date; you only had to step outside your back door.



Alan and Phil Luber in the alley, 1954

That alley was our playground. We played everything there: stickball and half-ball (city versions of baseball), touch football, basketball, wire ball, wall ball, and box ball.

We even had badminton tournaments. We strung a net across the alley and tied it to two clothes poles. If a car came down the alley, we used our rackets to lift the net as high as we could, so we could let the car pass underneath without having to untie and re-tie the net.

The alley had width-wide grooves cut into the cement every fifteen feet along its length to prevent buckling when the material expanded in hot weather. My brother Alan would stand on one groove while I walked four grooves and a half step down the driveway. This put us exactly sixty feet and six inches apart, which is the major league distance between the pitcher's rubber and home plate. We took turns practicing our pitching. If a fastball got past the catcher, sometimes the ball rolled all the way down the alley, across Tyson Avenue, and into the alley on the next block.

We used to buy pimple balls – small hollow white rubber balls with tiny raised circular protuberances that looked like pimples – and sliced them in half. We played stickball with those half-balls. They were incapable of breaking anything or hurting anyone, but whenever one landed near the house at the corner, the woman living there would immediately rap against the window, scowl, and shake a finger at us. Once she even called the police. I complained about her to my mother. “Why does she hate kids?”

“She doesn't hate you,” my mother replied. “What she hates is not having a child of her own.”

Solomon Solis-Cohen Elementary School, a sprawling structure with several wings, had a brick façade. Arriving there one morning, my friend David and I discovered that someone had used chalk to write an unfamiliar word, in all upper-case letters, on each and every brick in the wall outside our kindergarten door. It must have appeared at least two hundred times, once per brick. The wall was high enough that even an adult would have needed to stand on something to reach the top-most row of bricks. The unseen scribe

clearly had gone to great lengths to communicate this word to us, and thus David and I concluded that it must hold great significance.

David said, “What is that? What does it mean?”

“I don’t know. I’ll ask my mother when I get home.”

As a kindergartener I hadn’t begun learning in school how to read. But my parents had already taught me how to pronounce letters of the alphabet and, sometimes, to string a sequence of sounds into words. That afternoon, I did my best to figure out the pronunciation of this new word, and then I approached my mother.

“Mom, what does ‘fuck’ mean?”

I expected her to say, as she often said when I inquired about a new word, “Let’s look it up together in the dictionary.” Instead she stood there with mouth agape and an impenetrable but unmistakably dark expression crawling across her face.

She pointed at me as if she were accusing me of something. “Where did you hear that word?” Clearly, she was very, very unhappy with me.

“I didn’t hear it anywhere. Someone wrote it all over the brick wall at school. What’s the matter - did I say it wrong?”

Still stern, she said, “I don’t know what that word means, but I never want to hear you say it, ever again.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s a bad word.”

It took a few seconds for the incongruity to dawn on me. When it did, I said, “But if you don’t know what it means, how do you know it’s a bad word?”

“Because,” she replied, without missing a beat, “that’s the only type of word someone would write all over the kindergarten wall.”

Her illogic was unassailable. And so, oddly, it satisfied me. I went outside to play wire ball in the alley with David. He asked me if I had found out what our new word meant. “No, but it definitely means *something*.”

Castor Avenue was the main thoroughfare in our neighborhood. The block nearest my house had a bakery, a bar, a deli, and Betty

Lou's Restaurant. And it had the Tyson Theater, one of two movie theaters on Castor Avenue that were within walking distance of our house. These were single-screen affairs, as were all theaters back then. The Tyson was the statelier of the two, with ornate decorations, a balcony, and a well-stocked snack bar. Saturday afternoon matinees cost twenty-five cents, and I went there almost every weekend.

The usher, Mr. White, had silver hair that was impeccably groomed, and he always wore a jacket and tie. He was the meanest bastard in the world, a man constitutionally incapable of watching kids have fun without snarling. One day I did or said something that made him laugh – he was probably laughing at me, not with me – and I thought his face would split in half from using muscles that had been dormant for years.

A few blocks south on Castor Avenue was Malamud's Kosher Butcher Shop. Isaac Malamud was my step-grandfather. He married my father's widowed mother when I was five years old. My grandmother worked with my grandfather in his butcher shop. I used to stop by and visit them whenever I went to the public library on Castor Avenue. It was a genuine old-time meat shop, with sawdust on the floor to sop up miscellaneous animal fluids. I used to watch my grandfather emerge from his meat locker with blood stains on his apron, a meat cleaver held high, laughing and saying something in his thick east-European accent that I couldn't understand, the gleam of a total maniac in his eyes.

But the butcher was a gentle man. He loved tending his garden. He enjoyed knitting. He called my father "Bernie dear" and my mother "Ruth dear." My brother and I were "Alan dear" and "Philip dear."

I heard him raise his voice only once. I was eight years old, spending the day at my grandparents' house. My grandfather was watching the 1956 Olympics on television. A boxing match was underway: an American against a German.

My grandfather's back was toward me when I walked into his den. Intensely focused on the television, he didn't see or hear me

enter the room. The back of his neck was red, and his fists were clenched and resting on his knees. I heard him mutter the words, “Kill him,” in a harshly whispered hiss.

The American landed a hard blow to the German’s solar plexus. My grandfather pounded his fists on his knees. “Kill him.” Labored breathing, more fist pounding, and then again, louder this time: “*Kill him!*”

He leaned forward in his chair – “Kill him! – then backward – “*Kill him!*” – and then moved forward and backward in a rocking motion. “Kill him! Kill him! *Kill him!*”

The American boxer picked up steam, raining multiple blows on the German’s face and chest.

Slowly my grandfather rose, pulling himself to a standing position with his fists raised toward the heavens. “Kill him! KILL HIM! *KILL THAT NAZI MOTHERFUCKER!!!*”

The German boxer fell to his knees and then sprawled forward onto his stomach.

Suddenly conscious of my presence, his fists still raised, my grandfather turned toward me, smiled, and said, “Oh. Hello, Philip dear. How are you?”

11 Arlington

On a brisk November afternoon during our junior year in high school, David and I were tossing a football back and forth near the teachers' parking area at the end of the day. It was Friday, and neither one of us was in any particular hurry to go home.

From behind me I heard someone call out, "Turn the radio on so we can hear the news."

I turned around and saw two history teachers heading from the school building to the parking area. Out in front was Mr. Cohan: slight, wiry-built, jogging toward his car. Behind him, the second teacher, the one whom I had heard call out, was Mr. Caplan: tall, husky, briefcase in his hand, and – because he was walking briskly with his arms barely moving – looking something like a giant penguin in his white shirt, tie, and black overcoat.

I was still facing the parking area. David was behind me. I said, "Can you believe those guys? They act like the world will end if they miss a minute of the news." When I turned around and looked at David, I saw the worry in his eyes as he watched the two teachers duck into Mr. Cohan's car. "What? What's your problem?"

He said, "Something is wrong."

"What are you talking about, 'something is wrong'?" I held the football in my right hand and slapped it against my left palm. "Come on, go out for a pass."

David didn't move. "Something is wrong, I'm telling you. Really wrong."

He ran toward the school building. I followed him.

Our gym teacher, Mr. Cataldo, was exiting the building. "What's wrong?" David asked.

"The president was shot in Dallas," Mr. Cataldo replied, looking much more serious than I had ever seen a gym teacher look.

"President Kennedy?" I asked.

David looked at me as if I were an idiot. After all, how many presidents were there? He said, "How bad is it?"

"It doesn't look good. He's in surgery. A priest gave him Last Rites. I think it would be a good idea for you boys to go home. Your parents will wonder where you are."

David and I walked in stunned silence to the subway, where we parted company. I took a northbound train to Fern Rock station, and then I took the Y bus to my neighborhood. All the while I listened to the conversations around me. The tones were hushed. I remember hearing muted sobbing.

I took comfort in the fact that no one was speaking of President Kennedy in the past tense. But I knew instinctively that Mr. Cataldo was right when he said the prognosis wasn't good.

The bus driver dropped me at the corner of Cottman and Castor Avenues. I walked south on Castor, the same route followed a bit more than three years earlier by Kennedy's motorcade during the 1960 campaign. My mother and I were there that day. She was a big fan of the man. I knew she would be devastated by his murder.

I remembered the afternoon my family and I were in a restaurant in Hyannis, the Cape Cod town near the Kennedy compound. Our waitress was talking about the Kennedy family as if she knew them. After the waitress left our table, my mother, incensed, told my father she was going to report the young woman to the manager for referring to the president's father as "damn bastard Kennedy." My father informed her that the waitress was referring to the old man, who once was President Roosevelt's emissary to England, as Ambassador Kennedy.

I was the first one to arrive home that Friday afternoon in November of 1963. I switched on the television. The first thing I saw on the screen was a flag flying at half-mast outside the White House. I felt like throwing up.

I remember that evening, walking to the neighborhood store to get the late edition of the *Philadelphia Bulletin*. Along the way I passed several people, each one walking alone. I spoke to no one; no one spoke to me. But with each person I passed, there was a

moment...a meeting of the eyes...a silent acknowledgement that both of us were thinking about the very same thing...one thing that overshadowed consideration of all other things on that long-ago November night.

President Kennedy was buried in Arlington National Cemetery on the Monday before Thanksgiving.

* * *

A few days after Christmas, David and I stood before John F. Kennedy's snow-covered grave on an ice-cold sunny afternoon.



Our parents had given us permission to take a day trip from Philadelphia to Washington by ourselves. We were both fifteen, and in retrospect their permissiveness amazes me. David's parents were stricter and more over-protective than mine were. Without any evidence to support their belief, they thought I was more reliable and mature than their son. They reasoned that David wouldn't run into any problems as long as he was with me.

They were wrong.

We walked all the way from the Washington train station to the cemetery: past the White House...across the ellipse, where the National Christmas Tree had been lit just a few days earlier, at the end of thirty days of mourning...to the Washington Monument, where we took the elevator to the top and then walked down...past the Reflecting Pool to the Lincoln Memorial...and across the Arlington Memorial Bridge into Virginia.

Inside the cemetery, not far from the entrance gate, we joined the serpentine line that stretched up the hill toward President Kennedy's grave. It was late in the afternoon when we filed past the site. I remember the military honor guard, the flowers left behind by previous visitors, the eternal flame that the president's widow had lit at the end of his burial service.

As we left the grave area, I said, "I feel like walking around a little while by myself."

David said, "It's getting late. I think we should leave."

I looked down the hill, east toward the nation's capitol. All of Washington was bathed in winter afternoon sunlight. "It's not that late. I just want to walk for a little while."

I don't remember the arrangement we made: how long we would split up and where we would rendezvous. I *do* remember three things about that rendezvous: It was dark, it was cold, and – apart from the honor guard at President Kennedy's grave site – we were the only people there.

"Nice going, Phil."

"I guess night falls fast in the winter when the sun sets behind a hill."

"Who are you? Confucius? Come on – let's get out of here."

We walked down the hill to the cemetery gate. It was locked. David smacked his forehead with his palm. "That's just *great*," he said.

"We'll have to call the police to get us out of here."

"How are we going to do that? Cell phones won't be invented for another twenty-five years."

He didn't really say that, of course. What he said was, "The *police*? Are you *crazy*?" He spoke into an imaginary phone. "Hello, Mrs. Cohen? This is the police department in Arlington, Virginia. Your son and his friend aren't gonna make it home tonight. We just arrested them inside the national cemetery after dark. We think they broke in to vandalize the president's grave."

"Don't be ridiculous. The worst that happens is we miss our train and have to sleep all night in the station."

"Wow, my parents are gonna love *that*."

"We can sleep in shifts," I said, warming to the idea. "One of us will stay up while the other one sleeps."

"Come on, you moron. Get us out of here." He tried opening the gate again, to no avail.

I pointed to the Custis-Lee Mansion at the top of the hill. "Maybe there's a pay phone up there."

We made our way up the hill again. When we reached the mansion, I turned around and looked out once more at the city. The Lincoln Memorial, Washington Monument, and Capitol Building were illuminated. A very short distance down the hill, directly in front of us, a soldier stood guard over the president's grave. The eternal flame burned, and there was a dim blue glow from a nearby light. It was a haunting tableau, one of both sadness and beauty, and it will remain etched in my memory forever.

We found a pay phone and called the police. We were instructed to walk down the hill again. When we reached the bottom a park guard was already there, standing next to the now-open gate. He said, "Get out and stay out and never come back, you little bastards," and then he slammed the gate behind us.

Outside the gate, I held my camera as still as possible and aimed it at the cemetery. If you look closely, you will see two lights below the Custis-Lee Mansion: a light on the left that illuminated the grave site at night; and on the right, the eternal flame that Jacqueline Kennedy lit on November 25, 1963.



45
Alan

I asked my brother to describe his pain.

He said, “Pretend someone is plunging three-inch nails into both of your eyes. At the same time, a rottweiler is chewing on your testicles. Meanwhile, you’re being forced to listen to every record Paul McCartney has made since the Beatles broke up. Now imagine all of that pain is localized at the base of your spine, and you’ll know how it feels.”

It was May of 2003, and Alan was going from specialist to specialist, looking for an explanation for the pain he had been experiencing for a couple of months. The answer came soon enough, and it was simple, complete, and devastating: On May 13 he was diagnosed with stage four colon cancer.

Alan told me he thought he had no more than eighteen months to live. He was exactly right.

* * *

There was hardness in my brother that sometimes alienated people. He was often critical of others' behaviors and suspicious of their intentions, when perhaps a little less suspicion and a little more faith might have served him in better stead. Sometimes he acted like he didn't need anything from anyone.

And then he came down with cancer, and then he changed. Frightened and in despair, he revealed his neediness. And in so doing, he unlocked his tender and giving side.

It started with birds: Every morning in his last year of living, Alan filled seven bird feeders on his deck with seven different types of food, and then he sat inside and watched the birds flock. It was a simple act of caring that brought him daily pleasure.

Alan wrote about his final months in a series of essays that were forwarded and re-forwarded across the Internet, and in so doing he touched the lives of many people he didn't even know. The day Alan died, a magazine editor began his monthly column with these words: "Today I lost the best friend I've never met."

My brother lived those final months like the character in the Tim McGraw song that was popular at the time.

And I loved deeper and I spoke sweeter
And I gave forgiveness I'd been denying
And he said: Someday I hope you get the chance
To live like you were dying

* * *

After Alan's surgery I flew to Atlanta to visit him. I hadn't seen him since the unveiling of our father's tombstone in 2001. When I walked into his living room he was too weak to stand. He looked up at me and said, "There is no one in the whole world I would rather see right now than you."

From the day he was diagnosed until his death a year and a half later, except for a few days when he was unable to talk, we spoke by telephone every day. We talked about a lot of things, but more than anything else we talked about baseball.

Sometime during my brother's final year, we decided it would be great fun to make conference calls to Phillies players from our childhood on their birthdays. We were able to track down and wish happy birthday to a half-dozen players in the time that Alan had left.

To a man, these elderly former players were happy to know they were remembered and appreciated. Well, *almost* to a man. We ran into a problem when we called Don Browning (not his real name).

"Mr. Browning," I said, "my name is Phil Luber. I'm calling from Massachusetts, and my brother Alan is on the line from

Georgia. We used to watch you play for the Phillies when we were kids, and we're calling to wish you a happy birthday."

Alan said, "How are you, Mr. Browning?"

There was a pause on the other end of the line. And then Don Browning said, in a halting voice, "Not too good. I just came back from the hospital. My wife's in intensive care. I don't think she's gonna make it."

"Uh-huh," Alan said. "Now, when you set the record for most consecutive games with one or more doubles...."

I interrupted, mumbled some words of support to Mr. Browning, and ended the call. After Mr. Browning disconnected, I said, "Alan, you idiot. He just told us his wife is dying, and you're asking him about something that happened in 1962."

"Oh. Right. I guess I'll never get the answer to that question."

* * *

I visited Alan for the final time in September of 2004. We both knew it would be the last time we saw each other. He was intent on leaving me something to remember: He got tickets to see the Braves play and we went to one last baseball game together. I held my camera at arm's length and took the last picture of the two of us.



Phil and Alan Luber at Turner Stadium in Atlanta
September 24, 2004

* * *

A month before he died, Alan and I “watched” the playoffs and World Series together over the long-distance phone lines. In the league championship series, the Red Sox lost the first three games to the Yankees and then, miraculously, won three in a row to force a seventh and final game. I missed the first few innings of that game because I was at back-to-school night at Holly’s high school, but Alan kept me informed with text messages to my cell phone: “6-0 Damon grand slam.”

You will recall that on page three of this book there is a photograph of my father, then eight years old, standing in his father’s store. At some point in Alan’s final weeks, during a lapse in lucidity, he said that after he died his image would replace my father in that picture. Clearly he had seen *The Shining* one too many times.

The week before Alan died, I wrote a song called “Little Brother,” which is on the compact disk that came packaged with this book. I regret that I never got a chance to play it for him.

On a Sunday night in November, I was at an ice skating rink in Boston. My sister-in-law called my cell phone and told me that Alan wanted to say good-bye. There was a lot of noise, so I stepped outside into the chilly winter night. I didn’t understand anything he said: nothing, not a word. I think he was reasonably lucid, but incoherent (at least over the phone) because his tongue was severely swollen. His voice was calm and warm. I’m sure he told me he loved me. I assume he said something about baseball.

Two days later – on Tuesday, November 23 – my little brother died. He was only fifty-three years old.

* * *

The funeral was scheduled for the next day, which was the day before Thanksgiving.

Unnamed-For-Fear-Of-Being-Sued Airlines had a round-trip fare between Boston and Atlanta for \$250. Given the short notice and the proximity to the holiday, I thought that was a good deal. They could impose a fee of \$100 if I needed to alter my itinerary after the reservation was made, but I knew it was unlikely that I would be making any changes.

Then I saw this statement on the company's website: "In the event of a death or imminent death in your immediate family, Unnamed offers special Bereavement Fares." Information regarding pricing was only available by telephone, so I called to inquire about it.

The woman I spoke with told me that with a bereavement fare you are exempt from the \$100 change penalty. She said the round-trip bereavement fare between Boston and Atlanta was \$750. "Would you like to purchase a bereavement ticket, sir?"

I thought: *This is a joke, right?* I said, "Let me see if I have this straight. I can purchase a regular ticket for about \$250, and maybe I'll have to pay an additional \$100 if I change the reservation, which would give me a total of \$350. Or I can purchase a special bereavement fare that will cost \$750. Do I have that correct?"

"Yes, sir. That is correct."

"Is a bereavement reservation more secure than a regular reservation?"

"No, sir."

"Are bereavement tickets sometimes available, at the higher rate of \$750, when tickets aren't available any longer at the regular fare?"

"No, sir."

"Let's think about this for a minute. Why on earth would I pay \$750 for a 'special' bereavement fare that is \$500 more than I would have to pay regularly, and the most it will do for me is save me a \$100 change fee?"

"That would be your choice, sir."

Thank you, Unnamed-For-Fear-Of-Being-Sued Airlines, for giving me something to laugh about on such a sad day.

* * *

Remarks delivered at my brother's funeral service
Wednesday, November 24, 2004
Roswell, Georgia

I knew my brother his entire life. It sounds a little silly when I say it out loud. But for some reason that thought strikes me – that I knew Alan his entire life.

When we were kids, Alan collected lightning bugs and kept them in a jar in our bedroom so we could enjoy the glow.

He loved comic books.

He loved riding his bike.

We used to ride to the schoolyard on our bikes with a baseball bat and gloves, and a ball that had long ago lost its rawhide cover, replaced with tightly-wound layers of black electrician's tape.

We spent a lot of time down the Jersey shore. I remember a walk on the boardwalk with my mother and my brother when I was eight and he was five. My mother walked between us, holding hands with both of us, the breeze blowing through her hair, all of us laughing out loud. If I had to keep her forever in one moment, I think that would be the one. The extraordinary happiness of an ordinary moment in time.

Our father was a complicated man. Not given to displays of affection. Always making jokes, some of which were as likely to hurt you as they were to make you laugh. People walked on eggshells around him. But somehow, even as a kid, Alan managed to see beyond my father's bluster, to bring him down to human terms, and to make him laugh at the same time.

Like the time my parents could only get tickets for themselves for Rosh Hashanah services. Now, that was fine with Alan and me, because we hated going to synagogue. But at the last minute an older man in the congregation gave my father two extra tickets. Next thing we knew, there we were, dragging our feet as we

walked behind our parents to synagogue. My father turned around and said to us, “When we get there, please remember to thank Mr. Schacter for the extra tickets.” Alan looked at my father and said, “Sure, Dad. As soon as the Japanese thank us for the atom bomb.”

One day Alan and I were sitting in the living room with my father, watching a basketball game on TV. My father grew more and more frustrated with the team’s performance, and finally he leaped out of his chair, growled, and ripped his shirt from his body, exposing his massive, hairy chest. It was a very scary moment, until Alan jumped up and shouted, “It’s Superman!”

One night the four of us went out for dinner, and at the end of the meal we had scraps of meat on our plates. My father said, “It’s a shame to let this go to waste. I’ll ask the waitress for a bag so we can take the scraps home for the dog.” When the waitress came to our table my father said, “Can we have a doggie bag for the leftovers?” Without missing a beat, Alan clapped his hands and said, “Oh boy – we’re finally getting a dog.” I didn’t think my father would ever stop laughing.

Alan loved baseball. When we were kids we took two buses and the elevated train to Phillies games at Connie Mack Stadium in North Philadelphia. We would get to the ballpark before the ticket windows opened, buy general admission tickets, then run like hell to get seats in the upper deck directly behind home plate.

It was an incredibly crummy ballpark, and an incredibly lousy team, but somehow it just didn’t matter, because there was no place on earth we would rather be.

Two months ago, Alan and I were able to make it to a Braves game at Turner Field, and it was just like old times. There was still no place on earth we would rather be.

Alan loved the Beatles. He and I watched them all the Sunday nights they were on Ed Sullivan’s television show in 1964 and 1965. Alan had DVDs of all those Ed Sullivan shows, and we watched the Beatles performances again one of the last times we were together. I’ll remember that forever.

Not too long ago, Alan wrote: “Wouldn't it be great if we received twenty-four hours advance warning of when we were going to die so we could try to perform some significant task on our last day on earth? I think that I would call everybody I know and tell them how much I loved them if I knew for certain that the end was at hand. That would be more useful than changing the oil on my Volvo.”

Alan did know he was dying. And on many occasions, sometimes indirectly, but sometimes so directly that it was almost heartbreaking, he did take the time to tell us how much he loved us. It was a gift he left behind for us to enjoy forever.

Sometimes Alan would make a game out of trying to select an appropriate inscription for his gravestone. The funniest ones I can't repeat. But here are some of his almost-as-funny ones.

I should have been more specific when I said I wanted something with a good plot.

I slept with your wife when I was alive. (I've cleaned that one up for public consumption.)

I'm sure glad I have rollover minutes on my cell phone!

Please tape “Law and Order” for me.

Alan was fond of quoting a line that Paul McCartney sings near the end of the *Abbey Road* album. “And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make.” My brother need not be made larger in death than the man he was in life. To be remembered simply as a good and decent man, who loved his family and his friends, and baseball and the Beatles. Those of us who take him to his final rest today will keep him in our hearts forever.

You and I have memories
Longer than the road that stretches out ahead

Two of us sending postcards
Writing letters on my wall
You and me burning matches
Lifting latches on our way back home
We're on our way home
We're on our way home
We're going home

* * *

Almost two years later, in October of 2006, I opened the morning *Boston Globe* and turned to the sports page. It was baseball playoff season, and I glanced at the results of the previous night's games: the Cardinals over the Mets, and the Tigers over the A's.

But it was a smaller item that grabbed my attention. Johnny Callison, the right fielder of my adolescence – he of the cannon arm and the walk-off home run to win the 1964 All-Star game – had died at the age of sixty-seven. Gene Mauch, who managed the Phillies in the 1960s, once said that if he ever compiled a book to show all the elements that go into an ideal ballplayer, he would use photos of Callison swinging, bunting, running, sliding, catching the ball, and positioning himself to throw the ball.

For the thousandth time since my brother's death, I wished that I could call him on the phone – to talk about Johnny Callison and the other players of our youth, and the times we watched them from our favorite grandstand seats in Connie Mack Stadium.

That dilapidated ballpark we went to as kids was demolished decades ago. But in my mind's eye, I see it still. Alan is twelve and I am fifteen. We get off the Number 54 bus at the corner of 22nd Street and Lehigh Avenue. We wait for the ticket window to open, buy unreserved grandstand tickets, and then race to those seats on the seventh row in the upper deck, directly behind home plate.

A warm breeze is blowing toward center field. The Phillies run onto the field as the game begins, and Alan and I stand and cheer.

I watch my brother, so happy to see him again: the freckles on his nose, the smile on his face. There is no past or future. There's only here and now.

And I think: *Let summer be endless. Freeze this beautiful, precious moment, and let me stay in it forever.*