

Chapter 31

Last of the Ninth

My six year old grandson discovered the old photo of our Labor Day pick-up gang in my parents' attic. We were looking for the boxes and boxes of baseball cards that I cherished when I was a kid, back when Yaz and Tony C. and Jackie Robinson and Grandpa were bigger than life itself. I told my little grandson that my mom had thrown out the cards long, long ago.

"No way," he said. "Great Grandma wouldn't do something crazy like that. She'd never throw out baseball cards."

I will never throw out the memories. I remember the 1967 Boston Red Sox and the Impossible Dream season like it happened this morning. I remember curveballs and cherry cokes, the cafetorium at JFK and the pitcher's mound of Robinson Field, Red Sox games on the radio, Mike Milkiewicz's radio voice, Muriel White, Speed Miller, Boom Boom Cuevas, Joey Mitchell and Grandpa. 1967.

Going into the final week of the 1967 baseball season four teams were still in contention in one of the greatest and most improbable pennant races of all time. The Minnesota Twins, the Detroit Tigers, the Chicago White Sox and our Red Sox were tightly bunched together in the standings. On the very last weekend the Red Sox were one game out of first place behind the Twins and the Tigers but time was running out. We needed a miracle. On Saturday, Carl Yastrezemski walloped a 3 run homerun and the Red Sox beat the Twins. The Tigers took a "safe" 6 – 2 lead into the 8th inning of their game against the California Angels but lost when the Angels batted around and scored six runs. The Red Sox were tied in first.

The Romanowski living room, Holyoke, all of New England were hanging on every pitch on Sunday, the final day. Yaz did it again. Yaz went 4 for 4, making ten hits in his last thirteen at bats to win the Triple Crown with 44 homeruns, 121 RBI and a .326 batting average. More importantly, Yaz's clutch performance carried the Sox to a 5 – 3 victory over the Twins, knocking them out of the race. Now our attention turned to the Tigers. If Detroit could sweep a doubleheader from the Angels, there would be a tie for first place and a special play-off game between the Tigers and Red Sox would be held. If the Angels could win just one

of those two games, however; our Boston Red Sox would win the American League pennant. Our hearts sank as Detroit took the first of the two game set but when the Tigers' Dick McAuliffe grounded into a game ending double play in the final game, the Tigers were tamed. The Red Sox had done it. The Romanowski's living room, the streets of Holyoke, all of New England went nuts. Car horns beeped through Morris Heights. Dad scooped me up in his arms and danced around our tiny house nearly toppling a ceramic rooster. Pat hugged Mom who was crying glistening, joyful tears. Grandma, who had been living with us since Grandpa died, ignored her arthritis and did an Irish jig. The Impossible Dream had come true. The Boston Red Sox had won the American League.

My little grandson rummaged through the entire attic of my mom's house and didn't find a single baseball card but behind an Easy Bake oven and a never worn Gas ball cap was the photograph from Labor Day, 1967. My grandson pointed to a 12 year old blonde girl. "Is that you, Grams?"

"Yes it is, honey."

"And is this Great Uncle Pat?"

"Yes, that's Great Uncle Pat, too."

"Tell me all about it," my six year old grandson said.

"It's a long story, sweetie," I said.

"But those are the bestest kind, right Grams?"

"Yes, honey, they are."