

WHAT A SIMPLE DAILY EXPERIMENT
TAUGHT ME ABOUT LIFE

A YEAR OF *Playing Catch*



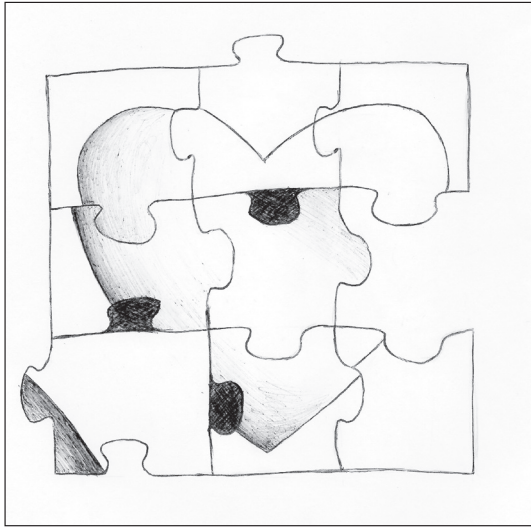
Ethan D. Bryan

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

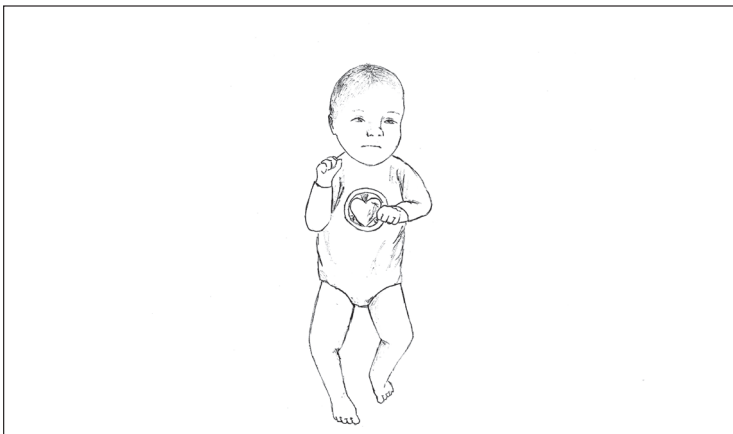
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Iron Boy Bigby

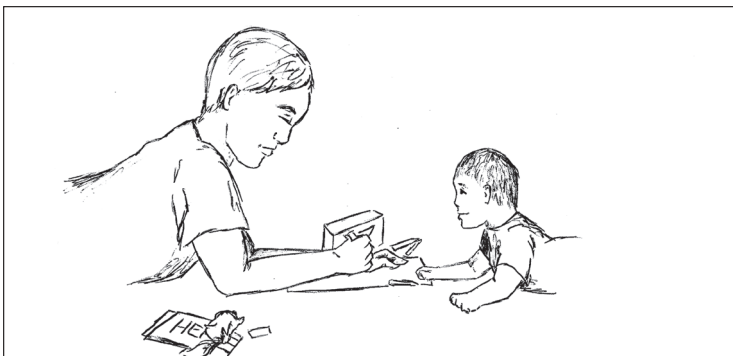
Bigby's Story



In June 2014, Bigby was born with a broken heart. There was a hole where there shouldn't be a hole, there were parts missing, and there were parts which seemed to be put in backward.



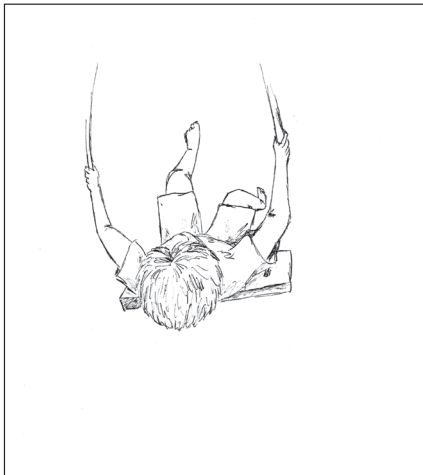
Six days later, Bigby had his first heart surgery. And that was the day Iron Boy Bigby was born.



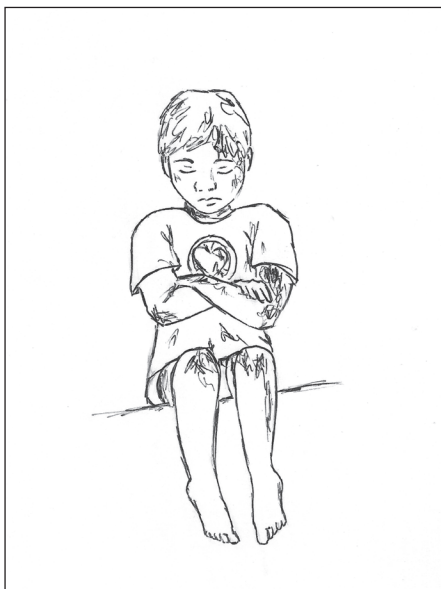
Iron Boy Bigby went home for the first time three weeks after his first surgery. His big brothers taught him about the important things in life: cartoons, crayons, and chocolate. Iron Boy was a little too small to understand everything they were saying, so he just smiled. Smiling is a grossly underrated superpower.



Six months later, Iron Boy Bigby had his second heart surgery. Doctors expected Bigby to spend weeks in the hospital recovering from the surgery. But superheroes often have special healing powers. Iron Boy Bigby went home four days later.



For three years, Iron Boy Bigby grew and did what boys do. He wrestled and played with his brothers. He watched cartoons and ate crayons and colored his face in with chocolate. He ran and jumped and made new friends at the playground.

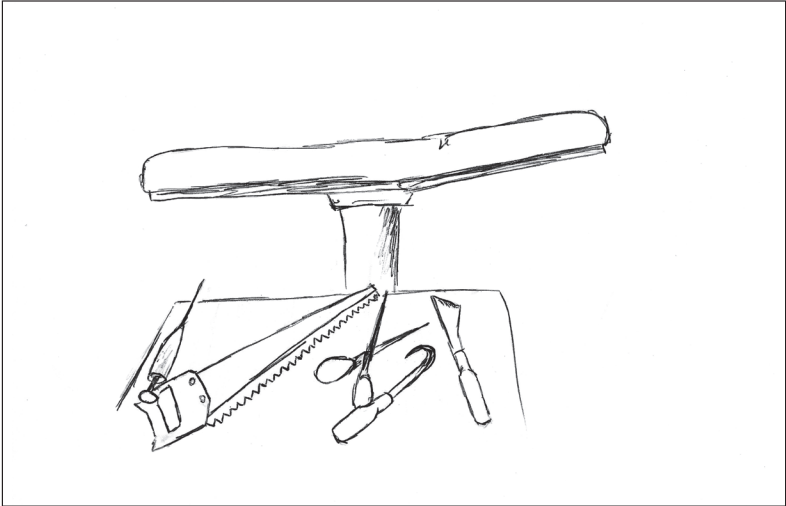


One day Iron Boy Bigby tried to run a little too fast. He tripped and fell on the sidewalk.

He scraped knees and elbows and had a knot the size of an egg on his forehead. Such is the life of a growing superhero.



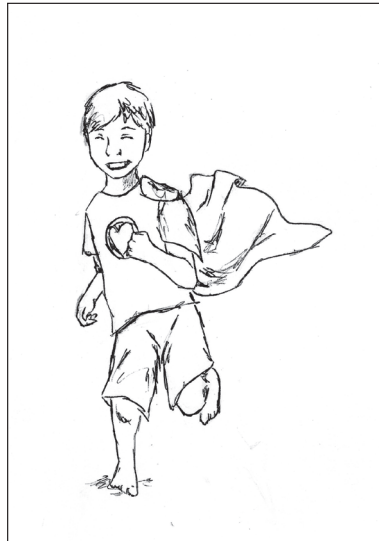
As he neared three years old, Bigby's heart couldn't keep up. He tired quite easily and took lots of naps. Doctors knew it was time for another surgery.

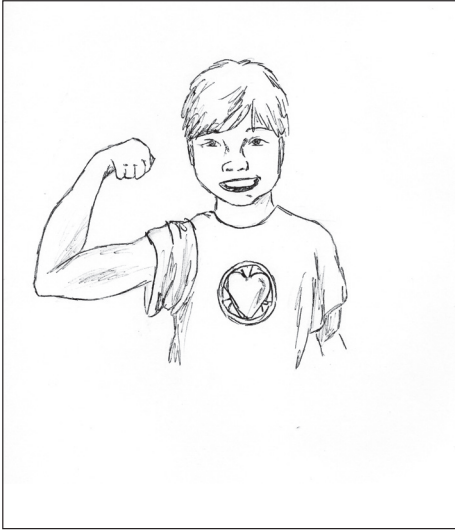


His parents tried to prepare him for the surgery, explaining how the doctors would have to cut open his chest to work on his heart. At first, Iron Boy didn't like the thought. He imagined big and scary things.

When his parents explained that this surgery would help him to run faster, to play longer, to better rid the world of evil, Iron Boy Bigby started to smile.

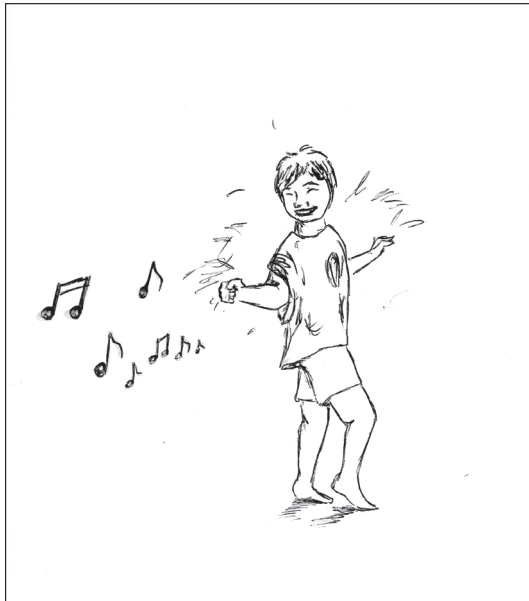
"I will run, run, run, fast, fast, fast!" he said with a gigantic grin.

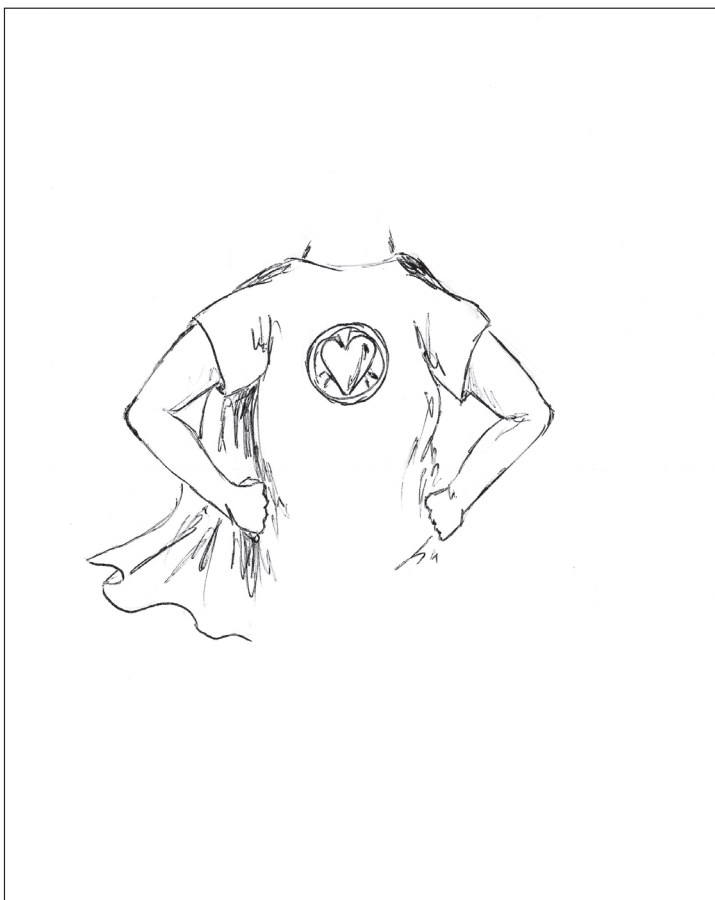




*"When I grow up,
I will be big and
strong like Iron
Man. I will fight
villains and go visit
children in Iron
Man's hospital."*

*Three days
after his third
heart surgery,
Iron Boy Bigby
was dancing in
the hospital,
bringing smiles
to everyone
around him.
Superheroes are
all about hope.*





And superheroes require a special heart.

Appendix

The Catch 365 Complete Roster

Day #1, Part One—Thirty throws with Sophie, my youngest daughter, in a 1-degree wind chill at Fassnight Field.

Day #1, Part Two—Twenty-five throws with Kaylea, my oldest daughter, in the back yard. It warmed up four degrees and created foggy glasses.

Day #2—On the way to see *Jumanji*, Sophie and I stopped again at Fassnight for thirty more throws.

Day #3—Greg Janssen is a musician and cameraman for the Kansas City Royals and Kansas City Chiefs. *Santa Claus Is Coming to Town* played as background music on the square as we played catch.

Day #4—I've known Andrew Sherrill for decades. Five Januarys ago, he learned he had leukemia. He's been in remission for three years now. We celebrated with lunch-break catch.

Day #5—The first game of catch on video with news anchor Daniel Shedd and photographer Chris Six of KOLR-10/CBS. This story was featured on multiple news stations nationwide.

Day #6—A cosplayer with a passion for charity work and the Cleveland Indians, Springfield's Thor, aka Chris Taylor, played catch in full costume, even though throwing with wrist guards on is ridiculously difficult.

Day #7—Harper Satterfield started bringing his glove to church last

year. For us, playing catch is almost sacramental. Sleet clicked off my glasses and my feet slid with every throw.

Day #8—I started playing catch with Dad when I was eight. Now he has arthritis in his hands. For the first time in years, we played catch in the back yard and celebrated Mighty Henry’s fourth birthday.

Day #9—Adam Riso watched game 7 of the 2014 World Series from the parking lot of Kauffman Stadium with his daughter. He understands my Royals fandom.

Day #10—Megan Rice is an award-winning sports journalist from Chicago whose big dream for 2018 is getting married in October. “Having a beer with Theo Epstein and getting the chance to interview him would be pretty awesome, too.”

Day #11—Chris Brammer is the director of the Springfield Men’s Chorus. A cold front passed through during our catch, dropping the temperature considerably, making Chris reconsider his concert plans for that night.

Day #12—The St. Louis Cardinals caravan came to Springfield. Pitcher and World Series champion Kyle McClellan threw perfect curveballs and knuckleballs in front of several witnesses. His nonprofit Brace for Impact 46 is doing amazing work in Haiti and North St. Louis.

Day #13—Nate Reed was accompanied by his dog Lucky. Nate does brilliant work with the Alzheimer’s Association. “When you meet the people and hear their stories, you want to help.”

Day #14—Church services were canceled because Springfield looked like the White Witch’s version of Narnia. So my family and I slowly drove to two locations for catch with Kristie Stoddard, then to the Satterfields’ with Harper and his siblings, Atticus and Radley.

Day #15—On the advice of my wife, I asked Jesse Sparks, who works at Johnny Mac’s Sporting Goods, to play catch in the indoor hitting tunnel. Jesse, a math student at Missouri State University and a Yankees fan, graciously agreed.

Day #16—Friend, teacher, rapper, BBQ lover, and Royals fan Josh

Kennedy and I met in front of the Royals World Series Champions mural at the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame. The wind chill was minus 15.

Day #17—Wyatt Wheeler is a writer for the *Springfield News-Leader* and wrote one of my favorite stories of 2017, about an eighty-hour charity baseball game. We made new tracks on a snow-covered Fasnicht Field.

Day #18—Journalist Jim Connell started writing sports stories just before I got married. A Chicago White Sox fan, he has interviewed Frank Thomas and dreams of interviewing Tiger Woods.

Day #19—Chandler Maples is a biology major at MSU who has played in a game at Hammons Field. He now helps coach the junior high school team in Clever, Missouri. “I knew my playing days were done, but I couldn’t get away from baseball. I had to find a way to get back.”

Day #20—I grew up going to church with Michael Olmsted, a Cubs fan whose dad was our pastor. We’ve played catch all over the state of Missouri. Kaylea joined us, and Michael gave her collegiate advice: “Enjoy the process. Whether you’re auditioning for a college or playing at church, your most important Audience absolutely delights in you.”

Day #21—Harper and Atticus Satterfield, Brennan and Chloe Stoddard, and I gathered on the first day of the week for the breaking of bread, the praying of prayers, and the playing of catch. I’m convinced playing catch is just another way of praying.

Day #22—Cory Goode, a Royals fan and dear friend, agreed to a game of catch to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the death of Yordano Ventura. “The game lives on.”

Day #23—Robert Myers is one of those genuine people who accepts people just as they are, who makes all misfits feel welcome and normal. We had cashew chicken followed by catch in the cold.

Day #24—Jeff Kessinger writes for the *Christian County Headliner*. We had lunch on the square in Ozark before catch, and Jeff quoted Ralph Waldo Emerson: “God will not have his work made manifest by cowards.”

Day #25—Art Hains is a Royals fan and announcer for the MSU Bears

and KC Chiefs Network. His walk-up song: “Joy to the World” by Three Dog Night.

Day #26—Alec McChesney interned with the *Kansas City Star* in 2017 and interviewed several of my favorite baseball players—Salvador Perez, Alex Gordon, and others. He’s endured three ACL surgeries.

Day #27—A twilight game with John, Kristin, and Drew “The General” Kessinger. I helped Drew catch a ball with two hands just like Dad used to work with me.

Day #28—Brett from Play OK Antiques sent an old Wilson glove for me to use at the *Field of Dreams*. Owen Hoebet is in Springfield because his daughter attends MSU. I used the new old glove for my first game of catch with a southpaw.

Day #29—Parker Boykin, a senior at MSU studying criminology, works at Johnny Mac’s. On a freezing day, we had to get managerial approval for another indoor game of catch.

Day #30—Kevin Agee is the social-media guru and storyteller at Missouri State University and a Royals fan. When Kevin was thirteen, then—KC Royals GM Allard Baird once called him.

Day #31—Coach Keith Guttin is in the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame and has a fantastic resume working with the MSU Bears baseball team, helping coach seventeen MLB players. “Every single time life knocks you down, you absolutely have to get back up.”

Day #32—Journalist Rance Burger wore a Tulsa Drillers hat and a Mizzou hoodie and likes odd and unusual athletes. My kind of people. He wrote a story of a student from India who played cricket and transitioned to play baseball at Central High School.

Day #33—On the first road trip of the year, Jake Mueller, former housemate, and I found adequate lighting at a skate park in Lee’s Summit, Missouri, for the first night game of catch. “The last time I played catch was with you. That was 2011.”

Day #34—Bob Kendrick, president of the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, on the Field of Legends. I stood next to Satchel Paige. He stood by

Josh Gibson and told stories of Buck O'Neil. "Buck would've played catch every day with someone if he'd had the opportunity. He loved the game that much."

Day #35—Matt Burke and Jeff Williams are dear friends and brothers-in-law who skipped out of the circus to join me on the MSU campus and play catch in a blizzard.

Day #36—Elisa Raffa is a graduate of Cornell University, meteorologist, and Yankees fan who once met Derek Jeter. We met at Meador Park on National Weatherperson's Day. Most of the snow from the previous day's blizzard was gone.

Day #37—Jonathan Stratman is a movie-making barista at Mudhouse Coffee. His reaction to learning he has a brain tumor made him internet famous. He asked me to write his obituary, which I did in exchange for catch. "Live caffeinated."

Day #38—Tom Trtan, a journalist and anchor, agreed to play catch and invited me on *Ozarks Live* for my second game on video. He had the idea that I should go to the United Nations and play catch and have conversations with international dignitaries. "Goodwill ambassador of catch playing and storytelling."

Day #39—Brad Beattie played professionally in the Baltimore Orioles organization and works for the Springfield Cardinals. He still plays in the Men's Senior Baseball League. "Through the game, I've learned about leadership and how to be a better person in the community, how to give back and live fully."

Day #40—Kevin Howard and Liz Delany are deejays on 105.9 KGBX, and Matt Parrish is the station manager. A radio interview and a parking-lot game of catch, including a toss into a car with someone just driving by.

Day #41—Keith Kaster taught me the value of perseverance while working in his music studio recording various projects. We played catch in the freezing drizzle before a MSU Bears basketball game and Postmodern Jukebox concert.

Day #42—Aaron Meyer, assistant coach for the MSU Bears baseball

team, after listening to Al Hrabosky share stories at the program's annual First Pitch fundraiser. Catch on the artificial green grass behind the facility was similar to playing on an ice skating rink.

Day #43—Derek Edwards, the assistant groundskeeper at Hammons Field, gave me a firsthand education in field maintenance. He was my boss for six weeks before I needed ankle surgery. Another indoor game while Springfield was covered in ice.

Day #44—Don Louzader is the voice of KTTS radio, especially during bad weather. He also holds the course record at Fun Acre Mini Golf. His knowledge of St. Louis Cardinals trivia is vast.

Day #45—On Valentine's Day, a game of catch with my wife, Jamie Bryan, and connecting Catch 365 to raising money for Miracle League in honor of her work with students who have multiple disabilities. \$110 was raised while she was at school.

Day #46—The day after another school shooting, I was quite anxious taking my daughters to school. Curtis Satterfield, the youth minister at Hope and Anchor Church, shared verses with me as we played catch. In the words of Buck O'Neil, "Don't let hate fill your heart."

Day #47—Professional photographer Bruce Stidham grew up in England and is a Detroit Tigers fan. After the Houston Astros won the World Series, Bruce took pictures of Bill Virdon, who used to manage for them. Bruce knew that Virdon had even been mentioned in an episode of *Seinfeld*.

Day #48—Mary Ellen Chiles is working on her thesis and is the poet laureate for the MSU Bears baseball team. Cousin of Jerry Lumpe, she hit a home run at Lumpe Field during a Fourth of July family reunion.

Day #49—After playing catch with Harper at church, I drove to Fassnight Field and played catch with two teenagers, Mack and Matthew. As soon as we were finished, they disappeared, oddly reminiscent of Lou Brock's angel story at Southern University.

Day #50—Lael Kennedy is Josh's oldest daughter. She greeted me dressed in all things Royals and we created her own baseball nickname as the wind tried to blow our hats off our heads.

Day #51—Jill Finney is Vice President of Communications for the United Way of the Ozarks. On a horribly rainy day, the YMCA let us borrow a racquetball court for catch and inspiration. When life throws a curveball, don't give up.

Day #52—Jeff Newlin is the owner of Play It Again Sports in Springfield. We played catch between the free weights and stationary bikes, followed by ground ball practice. An errant throw broke a mannequin's hand. Jeff donated a glove for southpaws to borrow that was used throughout the year.

Day #53—Andy Mills, general manager of Lambert's Café in Ozark, Missouri, started out as a roll thrower at the age of sixteen. I did not throw any rolls, just baseballs in the parking lot.

Day #54—Officer Jacob Boomgaarden stands six foot ten. He greeted me in full uniform plus thirty-five pounds of gear and borrowed the glove for southpaws. Giving stickers to kids is his favorite part of the job.

Day #55—Another February deluge fell inducing flash flooding. I was invited to White Brothers Baseball in Fordland, Missouri, where I joined in a practice session with Hunter and Aaron and their twelve-year-old teammates. Hunter graded me: "I'd give you a B. You've got talent."

Day #56—With the help of friends, we planned a surprise birthday party for Kaylea. The co-conspirators—Zoe Young, Carson Marquart, and Sophie Payne—joined me for catch after cake and presents in perfect weather.

Day #57—Kristy Frans is the director of RSVP, a nonprofit agency that engages senior adults in life-changing volunteer work. "Odd projects fit you well. Keep having fun."

Day #58—Nick Warnock is a photographer and an artist and the sound magician from church. We played catch near *The French Fries*, a sculpture that serves as a greeter to the Springfield Art Museum.

Day #59—Liz McCreight is a social-media marketing professional who helps organize the entrepreneurial community of 1 Million Cups, which meets at the art museum. Creating a community of dreamers and creatives is essential for the health of any city.

Day #60—Mack Brown is the quarterback coach for the Missouri State

University Bears football team. I struggled warming up with a football but found my rhythm when we switched to gloves and a baseball. Mack showed me several arm stretches I used throughout the year.

Day #61—In 1955, Bill Virdon won Rookie of the Year with the St. Louis Cardinals. He won the World Series with the Pirates in 1960. I heard the story of Bill's playing in a few games in 1968 after retiring and his only hit being a bottom-of-the-ninth-inning home run.

Day #62—Coach Neil Pittman was my high-school baseball coach, who coached for thirty-six seasons. We played catch at Kickapoo High School outside the field now named for him. I told him thank you for believing in me as a player.

Day #63—AJ Exner played baseball collegiately and later was the very first Strike the Sasquatch, the mascot for the Northwest Arkansas Naturals. At twenty-one months old, his son Benton was one of my youngest catch partners.

Day #64—Clay Engel plays baseball for Drury University. His miracle story involves falling off a mountain cliff, fracturing his skull and vertebrae, and being led by an angel down the mountain to the home of a retired navy medic, who administered first aid and helped him get to a hospital.

Day #65—"I never not know where this glove is," poet Loren Broadus said of his Bobby Bonds signature model he bought in fourth grade. Now a history teacher at Kickapoo High School, Loren emphasizes the role baseball played in the civil rights movement.

Day #66—In 1964, Coach Bill Rowe was the first coach for the Missouri State Bears. He stayed for nineteen years and then served as the athletic director for the university. "I really like what you're doing, playing catch, being with people. This is a good thing."

Day #67—On International Women's Day, I played catch with Jaimie Trussell, Senior Director of Community Engagement for Convoy of Hope. Jaimie's work has sent her around the world—Kenya, Haiti, Nicaragua, Tanzania, and Ethiopia—advocating for the empowerment of women.

Day #68—Debbie Doherty learned to play catch from Dave, her older

brother by thirteen years. His motto, “Learn to catch . . . or die,” helped prepare Debbie to be a stellar, two-sport athlete in college.

Day #69—Road trip #2, back to Kansas City. I played catch with Colten Shields, who has Prader-Willi syndrome, and helped him break in his new glove. My family and I fell in love with Colten when Jamie was his first babysitter. He practiced pitching and we watched a spring training game together.

Day #70—Ray plays on the Kansas City Royals wheelchair softball team. At a practice in preparation for the Wheelchair Softball World Series, I played catch (and took swings!) with Ray and two of his teammates. “When the neighbor kid down the street crashes his motorcycle, we want him and others to know we’re here.”

Day #71—Shayla Patrick is a former collegiate volleyball player at MSU. Now a Fox 4 News reporter in Kansas City, she offered Kaylea advice after her first college visit: “Take risks. Make new friends. And join the weirdest club you can find; you never know what you might learn.”

Day #72—Caleb Leaders is my cousin’s son and was in Springfield for his brother’s homeschool basketball tournament. He lives big and wears his scars proud. We threw pop-ups while his siblings watched from the swings.

Day #73—Tim Clegg is the founder of Hurts Donut Company, which he opened with less than seven dollars in his bank account. The doors have never closed. A former GM of the Ozark Mountain Ducks, he now uses his position to help raise money for the Multiple Sclerosis Society.

Day #74—Caleb Davis is a friend from church and plays baseball at Central High School. He was born in Kazakhstan, helped his parents plant a church in Hawaii, and is a sidearm pitcher who speaks softly but throws big breaking balls.

Day #75—Kirk Elmquist is the director of the Bass Pro Shops Legends of Golf tournament at Big Cedar Lodge. He used to work in the front office for the Springfield Cardinals and is responsible for first hiring their current GM. “Be aggressive. Don’t give up. Find a way to get to the people you need to get to. Don’t be afraid to ask for help.”

Day #76—Addi is a miracle. It took sixteen years for her condition to be diagnosed as TRAF7 syndrome. There are only twenty known cases in the world. Addi is a multisport athlete and is pretty much ambidextrous.

Day #77—Bill Cantrell is a friend from college who gave me a Jon Jay autographed bat, now that Jay plays for the Royals. Bill dreams of starting a podcast where everyone can share their stories, because sharing stories creates community and hope.

Day #78—Tyler is a life coach at I Pour Life, a nonprofit that helps young people transition into adulthood. “When you are pushed outside your comfort zone, that lack of comfort creates big opportunities, if you’re willing to put in the time and work. A true coach is someone who willingly sets their agenda aside to listen and help another person become better. And so much of coaching is applicable to all parts of life.”

Day #79—Local pastor and Baltimore Orioles fan Phil Snider has survived going viral and passionately advocates on behalf of the poor and culturally marginalized. Phil also coaches his son’s baseball team, so he has a bucket of baseballs and a fungo bat in his truck at all times. In the grass lot behind his church, he hit me fly balls after we played catch.

Day #80—Joe Murano is a New York Yankees fan who works the sunrise shift as an anchor for the Springfield CBS affiliate, KOLR-10. Joe is quite well-traveled and is enjoying settling into the community, meeting new neighbors, and running the trails throughout the Midwest.

Day #81—Oklahoma lawyer Josh Payton is one of my first best friends. A bird dog scout, Josh once clocked me throwing 71 mph. He’s now working on a nonprofit to help those in the minor leagues make a sustainable wage as they play ball.

Day #82—One of Luke Lohman’s throws finally broke the strings on my George Brett glove. We laughed and I caught the rest of his throws on the palm. Even if he cheers for the Cardinals, Luke is my kind of guy. “Playing catch was definitely the high point of my day.”

Day #83—Lauren Barnas is a news anchor on the Daybreak Team

for KOLR-10. She brought Jaxx, her German shepherd, with her to catch. Lauren's love of Springfield philanthropy sent her "Over the Edge," rappelling down the side of a building to raise money for the Child Advocacy Center.

Day #84—Riley Hesterly is a three-sport athlete: basketball, track, and baseball. He takes pride in his pitching and has a good fastball. Riley is a huge fan of his Special Olympics teams, and he annoys his older sister only some of the time.

Day #85—I played catch with Kendi Satterfield at the birthday party of a mutual friend three years ago. A year later, my family started attending the same church as Kendi and her family. From Ohio, Kendi played pretty much every sport in high school. She now is on the leadership team at church and advocates on behalf of children with severe emotional and behavioral needs.

Day #86—Dr. Kayla Lewis is a professor and graduate literacy program coordinator at Missouri State University. It was as we played catch that I learned she is also Chickasaw. "I see diversity and the need for diversity everywhere. I intentionally incorporate multiculturalism in all I do. As a literacy professor, I have the joy and responsibility of doing it through books."

Day #87—Tammy Flippen is the organizer of events and chaos at The Library Center, specializing in grants and community involvement. A talented resource librarian, Tammy helped me research for *Dreamfield*. Thanks to a never-ending sense of humor, Tammy has survived six ankle surgeries.

Day #88—On MLB's opening day, I did a baseball poetry reading to more than two hundred fifth graders. After poems and stories, I used my brand-new Wilson glove to play catch with several students in Josh Kennedy's fifth-grade class.

Day #89—John Sellars is the executive director of the History Museum on the Square. John shared multiple stories of Springfield history and its impact and importance today. "What we need to do is put our arms around one another and commit to making the future brighter and better. Together."

Day #90—Like me, Joel Gammon has alopecia. I constantly remind and tease him about wearing hats and sunscreen at all times. While Joel was

playing second base last summer, a ground ball took a bad hop and went in the sleeve of his jersey. Life is all about adapting to the bad hops.

Day #91—On Easter, it was still cold. Spring had not sprung. Kaylea and Sophie played catch with me before church and agreed to an interview. “Putting yourself out there and trying is important because you never know where it will get you,” Kaylea said. “Hang in there, hopefully it’s going to get warmer soon,” said Sophie.

Day #92—Andrew Sherrill and his eight-year-old son, Lucas, met me at the Miracle League field in the dense fog for a slippery game of catch on the artificial field. We kept playing as the sun set, and Lucas was hurt on an errant throw (by me) caused by the slippery surface. He drew me a picture of a baseball as a sign of his forgiveness.

Day #93—Jamie Kessinger and her two-year-old twin sons, Romey and Finnegan, played catch with me in their back yard. After years in restaurant management, Jamie followed in her family’s footsteps of styling hair. Her boys, while identical twins, preferred to throw the ball with opposite hands. Catch was followed by high fives and the blowing of bubbles.

Day #94—Kendal Dingus is one of Springfield’s 40 Under 40. A banker with a corner office and three computer screens, he is also a remarkable artist who transforms barn wood into all kinds of amazing furniture.

Day #95—Marty Prather is known around St. Louis Cardinal and Missouri State nations as The Sign Man. The owner of multiple Domino’s Pizza stores, he makes signs for every game he attends. He greeted me with my own sign: “Wanna play catch?” Marty was elected into the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame because of his superfandom.

Day #96—Chris Donegan has been playing softball since before we attended college together. Doing all things with a smile on his face, he still plays weekly as well as umpires. “It’s just fun being on the field, you know?”

Day #97—After a mid-April snow, Sarah Sparkman, better known as Cupcakes, led me in a series of yoga stretches before catch. A brilliant lawyer, Sarah is a passionate fan of the Royals and the Northwest Arkansas Naturals. Sarah advocates on behalf of victims of domestic battery and abuse, helping

them to receive a fair resolution and find the resources they need to begin the healing process and move forward.

Day #98—"My glove is always in my car," Sarah Odom said. "I think it's a sign of hope." A middle-school principal, Sarah has spent two decades in public education and knows about the importance of both play and hope. After a morning of April snow, Sarah encouraged me: "This too shall pass."

Day #99—Jennifer Johnmeyer, the creative manager at Alamo Drafthouse Movies, organized a screening of *Field of Dreams* to benefit Springfield's Miracle League. We filled 90 percent of the theater, which helped support fourteen players. W. P. Kinsella would have been proud.

Day #100—Ryan Wolfe is the general manager of CY Sports Center, an indoor baseball training facility. A faithful encourager and supporter of Catch 365, Ryan found me several catch partners throughout the year and provided indoor space when the weather turned bad. I cheered him on as he played in the Grip 'N' Rip Baseball League.

Day #101—I celebrated a birthday game of catch with Bill Shedd, who recently retired after spending thirty-nine years working in radio. I did not know it was his birthday or else I would have brought birthday donuts. Bill also spent a decade coaching youth baseball teams. "I love working with younger people and teaching them the right way to play the game—about respect for the game, for teammates, for coaches, and for opponents. In return, I learned a lot about patience! But it sure was a lot of fun."

Day #102—Emily Hall is a paraprofessional teacher at Delaware Elementary working toward earning her master's degree in special education from Drury University. "These kids have definitely changed my life. The joy they have is contagious. By no means is the job easy, but it is so rewarding."

Day #103—At The Barn at Belamour, a premier wedding venue north of Springfield, I played catch with Kim Bell on the birthday of her late husband, Howard. Kim's heart for hospitality has found its best expression and purpose in celebrating love. Kim gave an acceptance speech when Howard was inducted into the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame.

Day #104—Justin Glazier used to work for the Springfield Cardinals

and the Tacoma Rainiers and is now working toward a master's degree in project management. Justin and I survived cold, whipping winds and a neighbor's dog, who interrupted our game of catch multiple times.

Day #105—Lester Ratcliff is an umpire who dreamed of working a district championship game. (His dream came true.) Lester moved to Springfield to run track and play football at MSU. On Jackie Robinson Day, Lester emphasized the importance and effects of Jackie's legacy seventy years later.

Day #106—Sterling Huff encourages entrepreneurs. At the weekly meetings of 1 Million Cups, he provides space and feedback helping those who are starting their own business find their way forward. "My favorite part is watching the connections take place that happen only in an environment where entrepreneurs ask for help and are willing to learn so they can better shape whatever they are working toward."

Day #107—Larry Flenoid declared April 17 "417 Day" and threw a party. While the event staff prepared for the free neighborhood party, we played catch. "There's so much in this world that causes division, I just felt called to pour my heart into loving neighbors and my community. You have to choose to celebrate what's good. Take a risk and do something that brings people together."

Day #108—Chandler Maples (day #19) invited me to spend time with the Clever Middle School baseball team. Long toss with Dylan and Carson and pop flies and hitting the cutoff man and batting practice: it was a perfect day on the field.

Day #109—Matt Morrow is the president and CEO of the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce. "This is a great community and there are unlimited opportunities for both entrepreneurs and existing businesses to grow. The people of Springfield are quite special. Their attitude and approach to life exemplify the best about life in the Midwest."

Day #110—I taught Kaylea and Sophie how to catch pop-ups. Just like life, catching pop-ups is all about persistence and perspective, overcoming the fear of getting hurt and trusting your skills.

Day #111, Part 1—Twenty years ago, Patrick Stewart and I met on the

campus of MSU at the Baptist Student Union. He first encouraged me to pursue vocational ministry when I was a freshman in college. He now helped me prepare for life as my oldest daughter is thinking about college. Friends are a gift from God.

Day #111, Part 2—Taking a break from math homework, Kaylea wanted to play catch and asked questions about baseball and life after high school.

Day #112—Bethany Kennedy sang songs about the power of love and hope during our church's worship service. A fiercely competitive board-game player and Royals fan, she braved rain and avoided puddles in a quick game of catch before lunch.

Day #113—Ashlynn is a slugger for her Miracle League team. Before the game, she had a track meet and competed in shot put, the 100-meter dash, and javelin throw. She won a gold and two silver medals. Everyone cheered when Ashlynn stepped up to the plate and hit a line drive off the left-field fence.

Day #114—In the same year as his twentieth wedding anniversary, Adam Lawrence filed for and was granted disability. "When people ask me what I'm thankful for, I always say disability. Through it I've found my calling to serve others and give back to the community." Adam now volunteers at a food pantry serving three hundred people each month.

Day #115—Because of a deluge, every baseball game in southwest Missouri was canceled. Nick Francis volunteered to brave the rain for catch. Nick has lived around the world teaching English as a missionary. An entrepreneur and a handyman, he now helps friends find affordable housing through repairing and renting houses.

Day #116—I did a storytelling for Matt Burke's eighth-grade class at Reed Academy and answered their questions about playing catch, living a good story, and chasing dreams. I invited the whole class for a game of catch. Several participated in wearing a glove and throwing a ball for the first time.

Day #117—Dustin Langston is a motorcycle-loving drummer and realtor. His teammate in the house-hunting world is Joseph Keil, who took

pictures and videoed via drone while we played catch outside their office. “Life is good. Let’s make it better.”

Day #118—On the way to hearing Kaylea play in the state music contest, Jamie and I stopped in Lebanon for lunch and catch with Tanner Angst. Tanner is a sophomore at the University of Missouri studying business with dreams of being the GM of a major league team. “Not everything in life is going to go your way. Whenever the odds are against you, you have to keep battling and trust that all of the hard work you’ve put in will, someday, pay off.”

Day #119—Wearing matching Salvador Perez T-shirts, I played catch with my nephew, the Mighty Henry, who wore his favorite orange glove. Kaylea and I practiced knuckle curveballs afterward, then Henry and I cooled off and shared a Dr Pepper.

Day #120—After I presented at 1 Million Cups, James Bonds pulled me aside and prayed for my arm. An impeccably dressed life coach and motorcycle racer, James’s mission is to bring hope and healing to the world, equipping people for life today and tomorrow, creating space in which they might live purposeful and focused lives.

Day #121—Larissa Breshears is passionate about sharing stories of those living on life’s margins and coordinates the 7 Billion Ones project. While Randy Bacon took pictures, we played catch and Randy told me of the inspiration behind the project. “What I’m learning from my story and sharing the stories of others is that this day is meant to be magical. No matter what happens during the day, it will be filled with moments of blessing and inspiration. You just have to look for them.”

Day #122—An early morning Rotary Club storytelling connected me to Will. Will is a southpaw who coaches his daughter’s team. He shared stories of Stan Musial and Buck O’Neil as we played catch near the eighteenth green of Twin Oaks Country Club.

Day #123—Dan Reiter is the general manager of the Springfield Cardinals. His job is to create space where families and friends make memories while enjoying the game. “I work in baseball because I absolutely love this game, but several times you have to step back and remove the fan

from the businessperson. Baseball is teaching me that everyone needs to have more fun. In general, we need to lighten up and work on having more fun.”

Day #124—“College baseball literally saved my life,” said Ben Goss. At a Stetson University game, Ben suffered an idiopathic ventricular tachycardia. Now a professor at Missouri State and an announcer for the Bears baseball team, Ben travels the country each summer visiting baseball stadiums and hearing baseball stories.

Day #125—Ken Teague was born to love baseball. “I was named Kenton, after Cardinals Gold Glove All-Star Ken Boyer.” Now an insurance agent, he brought his family of St. Louis Cardinals fans to Doling Park to play catch, and he told me about his epic spring training trip: nine stadiums in six days.

Day #126—At my church’s annual May Day Soiree Grill Some Food and Come and Play event, several friends joined me in catch before and after lunch, including young southpaw Henry Haynes shortly before he had to leave for baseball practice.

Day #127—Jamie’s class took a field trip to the Miracle League field. I brought gloves and appropriate baseballs and played catch with several of her students. One of them laughed every single time he threw and caught the ball. Throw. Laugh. Catch. Laugh. Repeat. It was wonderful.

Day #128—Jay Fotsch is a deejay and an emcee for the Springfield Cardinals. After I sang a horrible rendition of Taylor Swift’s “Shake It Off,” we played catch in the Power 96.5 studio while on the air, successfully dodging microphones, lights, and mixers. Jay’s fiancée is a Royals fan, and she called in to the show in my support. “Baseball is more than just a game.”

Day #129—Dustin Stewart works across the street from the Do Good mural off of Commercial Street in Springfield. In 2015, on the day after Christmas, his farmhouse was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. His wife was five months pregnant with their second child when the lightning hit. Now a woodworker, Dustin crafts and designs beautiful furnishings.

Day #130—Jim “The Rookie” Morris had a Disney movie made about his life’s incredible journey. At Kauffman Stadium, he gave me advice about never giving up on dreams. “Life is never going to stop throwing things at you.

How you choose to react determines whether you grow or give up. God took me, the person least likely to be a speaker, and turned him into a storyteller.”

Day #131—Noble Bowman serves as the chaplain for the Missouri State University softball team. “Every journey, every story, every dream is filled with obstacles. If you’re willing to pay the price, those obstacles are just a stop on the way to your ultimate destination. If you’re willing to pay the price. The choice is always yours.”

Day #132—The Fighting Jackalopes softball team was resurrected. Josh Kennedy, Bethany Kennedy, Jesse Kennedy, Dustin Langston, Barbie Langston, John Kessinger, Kristin Kessinger, Luke Caddy, and Ollie Kessinger invited me to practice.

Day #133—On Mother’s Day, before church and not just wearing a T-shirt, I played catch with Mom (Sheri Bryan) and gave her a small bouquet of flowers.

Day #134—Robyn Fondren is the counselor at Delaware Elementary. A Royals fan, she was awarded Elementary Counselor of the Year and encourages big dreams. “Go for it. No matter what happens, you’ll find support along the way. No matter what the outcome is, you’ll be one step closer to your goal, and you’ll learn things on the journey, too.”

Day #135—Stephen Herzog is a writer and storytelling coach for the *Springfield News-Leader*. A recovering sports reporter, Stephen was working on an end-of-the-school-year story about the influence of teachers. “I love being able to influence change.”

Day #136—Former Springfield mayor Bob Stephens grew up just a few blocks away from our catch-playing venue. “When I’m driving past a ballfield and the lights are on and the dust is hanging over it, my car keeps trying to turn in!” Bob gave me my first lesson in politics. “If someone wants to give you credit for doing something good, even if you didn’t do it, take it.”

Day #137—Steve Lael and Don Garner coached together at Branson High School and have accrued five combined decades of baseball wisdom through fungos and fastballs. “No transfer of blame,” said Coach Garner.

“You accept responsibility for what you do or don’t do.” “You learn to get over failure, find the good in it, and move on. Baseball’s better than football because you get to play the next day. There’s always another at bat coming,” said Coach Lael.

Day #138—Daniel Shedd followed up his interview on day #5. In a good story, characters are changed through conflict and struggle. He asked the question that stayed with me for the rest of the year. “How is playing catch changing you?”

Day #139—Stephen replaced the shattered windshield in the Bryan Family *Millennium Falcon*. As a teenager, he got involved with the wrong crowd and spent two years in prison. He changed his life and is now pursuing a degree with dreams of being an autonomous vehicle engineer. “Making mistakes is an opportunity to learn. I learned and I changed.”

Day #140—Between spring storms, Dad, Kaylea, and I had a three-generation game of catch in the same back yard where I learned how to throw a curveball.

Day #141—Michael Vincent used to be a catcher in the Cincinnati Reds organization, winning the 1985 Double-A Eastern League championship with teammates Rob Dibble, Chris Sabo, and Barry Larkin. Pete Rose and Johnny Bench he knew as coaches. Michael has played ball in thirty-six states and five countries.

Day #142—Played catch with Little Bear of the Beijing Shougang Eagles at U.S. Baseball Park.

Day #143, Part 1—Played catch with Stephanie Young, principal at Delaware Elementary School.

Day #143, Part 2—Played catch with Simone Wearne, who was working with the Aussie Spirit. Simone is the only female inducted into the Australian Baseball Hall of Fame.

Day #144—Darrin Bell and Jake Bell after Howard Bell was inducted into the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame.

Day #145—Brett Kesinger and Bo Kesinger at Kauffman Stadium.

Day #146—Mike Engel at the charity softball game.

Day #147—Leksi Macan and her softball team at a Memorial Day tournament.

Day #148—Martie Cordaro, the general manager of the Omaha Storm Chasers in Omaha, Nebraska.

Day #149—Nathan Rueckert, the president and founder of the Baseball Seams Company in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Day #150—Ryan Cellan, who volunteers to maintain a field in his back yard in Wallingford, Iowa.

Day #151—Bigby Suddarth, who has endured multiple heart surgeries in his first three years of life, and his dad, Tim.

Day #152—Mary Moore, a player in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, and umpire Perry Barber in Rockford, Illinois.

Day #153—Shane Lamie and Shaun Lamie at Millennium Park in Chicago, Illinois.

Day #154—Kaylea and Sophie in center field at Impact Field, the home of the Chicago Dogs.

Day #155—Brandon Rollwagen works for the Arc of the Ozarks, helping individuals with disabilities live as contributing members of the community. Brandon coordinated a high-fiving, compliment-filled game of catch with his son, Gunnar, and client Eli.

Day #156—Formerly dead person from day #124, Ben Goss is starting a new baseball-themed T-shirt company, Long Ball City. He gave me a T-shirt honoring George Brett's pine-tar home run of 1983.

Day #157—Adam Robles is from Daytona Beach, Florida, but was working in St. Louis. He woke up at 5:00 a.m. to drive to Springfield to play catch before driving back to St. Louis to board his flight home. "You've gotta grind it out. You just don't know what's going to happen. Adapt to life's curveballs. Wait for the break, and take your swing."

Day #158—Cyrus Taylor is the commissioner of Springfield's Miracle League, which started in 2010 with thirteen players. There are 213 players signed up to play this season. "Miracle League is a consistent reminder of what's important in life. We are able to provide everything good about

baseball, all the fun aspects, giving anyone who wants to play the opportunity to hit the ball, run the bases, and touch home plate for their team.” Every child deserves a chance to play baseball.

Day #159—Trent Sims is the director of development at Springfield’s Victory Mission, a faith-based nonprofit that focuses on long-term reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reentry into society. “I really think God works with us to do good in this world, and there’s great freedom in that.”

Day #160—A mistyped number and text message connected me to Sarah Sample, the director of information technologies for Keller Williams. “I live my life like improv. I say, ‘Yes, and . . .,’ then see what happens. So many amazing and unique opportunities open up when you have the courage to say, ‘Yes, and.’”

Day #161—Ava Rollwagen and Carolina Kessinger are stepsisters and catch-playing rookies. Ava loves to read and would like to be a doctor; Carolina is fascinated by dance and would like to be a teacher. A Sunday afternoon catch in the shade of a tree after a Springfield cashew chicken lunch is a practically perfect way to spend an afternoon.

Day #162—Mike Essick has been the head coach of the Ozark High School baseball program for twenty-four years. His record is 449–210 and includes two state championships, six district championships, and fifteen Central Ozark Conference titles. “Pay attention and this game will teach you everything, especially during adversity. It reveals your character quickly and emphasizes self-control. It’s a game about making the most from what you have been given.”

Day #163—I woke up at 5:45 a.m. to play catch with tailgate specialist Mark Menard. Mark is an old soul who smiles and finds the silver lining through all of life’s struggles and trials. He is helping umpire games for kids in KC. “It’s purely volunteer work, and anytime parents complain, I tell them we could always use more volunteers.”

Day #164—Jeff Houghton is the creative force behind Springfield’s own Emmy Award–winning late-night talk show, *The Mystery Hour*. He’s also the originator of the Instagram Husband concept. “You don’t have to believe the

fallacy that there are places for dreamers and it's far away from where you are now."

Day #165—Isaiah Goodwyn asked a bold question: "Can I have your glove?" Asking bold questions should always be encouraged. Near the end of Catch 365, just like the Wilson Sporting Goods Company gave me the glove, I passed on the perfectly broken-in glove as a late birthday gift to Isaiah, hoping to inspire more baseball dreams in the next generation.

Day #166—John Miller turned his childhood passion into a paying job. "I saw these guys on TV and listened to them on the radio and it struck me that they were getting paid to watch sports and help bring the game to other people." He now does play-by-play work for Drury University, calling games of all varieties: basketball, soccer, volleyball, baseball, and softball.

Day #167—On his thirteenth birthday, Beau Warren was playing in a baseball tournament for the SEMO War Eagles and hit a home run. "Keep your head up when you win and when you lose, and encourage your teammates."

Day #168, Part 1—On Father's Day, which was also Jim Huntsinger's fiftieth birthday, we played catch and ate donuts. Jim drove 611 miles to connect with me. "There's just so much negativity in this world, on the news every day. And you were playing catch to have fun and to connect with people. I thought it was cool and wanted to be a part of it."

Day #168, Part 2—We drove 525 miles to connect with David Dollar and his son Campbell in Birmingham, Alabama. David knows about the importance of play, helping create magic for families headed to Disney World. "I love helping people who have no idea what they are doing have an incredible, unforgettable vacation."

Day #169—Rickwood Field in Birmingham, Alabama, is the oldest professional baseball field in the United States. Dan played catch and gave me a tour of all the famous ballplayers who have stepped foot between the lines. "More than 175 players in the Hall of Fame have played baseball at Rickwood," Dan told me. "More than any other stadium." Bill Virdon played a few games here in 1953.

Day #170—In Jacksonville, Florida, Aaron Unthank treated us to breakfast at Dano's Diner, where the Colonel warmed me up with catch after filling my belly with fantastic fare. At the field where he used to coach his son Eli, Aaron and I played catch and chased pop-ups and practiced first pitches. Aaron is a musician, and his song "Courageous" served as a theme song for the trip.

Day #171—The Daytona Tortugas were the very first MiLB team to reach out and extend a catch-playing invitation. Playing at Jackie Robinson Ballpark, built in 1914, the Daytona Tortugas are the Class-A Advanced affiliate of the Cincinnati Reds. Luke Mauro is the radio broadcaster for the Tortugas and coordinates all the social media. "On March 17th of 1946, this was the field where Jackie played his first game as a member of the Dodgers organization."

Day #172—Before we visited the Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Studios, Kaylea, the only member of Ravenclaw House in my family, played catch with me just outside our hotel room. "As I think about the books and the series, some of the thoughts that have really stuck with me are the importance of real friends who stick with you and that love is the strongest power."

Day #173—Before our second day indulging in all things Harry Potter, Sophie, a proud Hufflepuff, played catch with me. "Hufflepuffs are known for being kind and loyal, and this world really needs people who practice being kind and loyal every day. The main theme you see throughout all the books is the power of love. It's the first lesson you learn about at the end of the first book and ties together the whole series. Love never fails."

Day #174—In Valdosta, Georgia, sportswriter Derrick Davis connected me with Chris Hetrick and his son, Cameron. A helicopter mechanic in the air force, Chris has coached Cameron's baseball team for several seasons. "Baseball is a game of the meeting of the simple and the complex. I can explain the basics to you in just a couple of minutes, and we can spend a lifetime studying and learning all the nuances."

Day #175—Collin Cunningham is my sister's neighbor. A fan of

Derek Jeter, Collin is a third baseman and pitcher for the Conway High School baseball team, and we spread out across his front lawn to play catch. “Baseball’s taught me that there are no shortcuts.”

Day #176—Bill Patterson is an optometrist and the founder of the Conway Braves program in Conway, Arkansas, which is similar to Miracle League. My nephew Henry has played ball through this program in past seasons. At age eight, Bill’s son, Ben, was discovered to have neurodegeneration with brain iron accumulation. “Kids like Ben are constantly going to doctors, all the different therapists and appointments, but on the ballfield, they can really be a kid.”

Day #177—Matt Wilkie is Field Teams Director for international-aid nonprofit Convoy of Hope. Haiti, East Africa, Philippines, and Central America—Matt has truly seen the world. “The hardest part of travel, of course, is being away from my family, but I am thankful to have their support. The best part is the people I meet around the world.”

Day #178—On his birthday, in a heat index of 105, Drew Boone and I celebrated with catch. Gifted with an excellent sense of humor, Drew said, “As I’ve gotten older, I’ve become more pragmatic. I hope my car makes it to the end of the year.”

Day #179—On his birthday, which is also the birthday of his son, at Springfield Catholic High School, where he works, I played catch with Baltimore Orioles fan Dante Rebori, who once sat in the dugout with the Orioles before they played a game in Kansas City.

Day #180—Brent Parker is the general manager of the University Plaza Hotel. On the building’s rooftop, nine stories high, we played catch. Sometimes you need a change of perspective.

Day #181—Professional baseball players run in Emilio’s family. Emilio Vela Jr. is a consultant and CEO for nonprofit organizations, helping these organizations do their best work. “Get involved! Change happens only by those who have the courage to get involved. We tell stories to empower people to get involved, to give back, to teach others to use their voices. It’s about the people, always the people. Not the budgets or bottom line but

advocating for and with people so they can live good lives, so they, too, can give back.”

Day #182—For the very first time in our lives, I played catch with my sister, Katy Oswalt. We have video proof.

Day #183—At the halfway point, Ann Willingham gave me a history lesson in Springfield baseball, including Branch Rickey, Stan Musial, and Mickey Mantle. An expert in making chocolate-chip cookies, she still plays catch with kids in her neighborhood and enjoys cheering for the major leaguers when they make rehab assignments in Springfield.

Day #184—For Andrew Sherrill’s thirty-third birthday, we played catch and he informed me of his move to Kansas City. “I didn’t want to grow old and look back at my life wishing I’d done a better job of doing the good work God’s got planned for me. I knew now was the time to go all in.”

Day #185—Owen Wilkie is a writer and southpaw celebrating his seventy-third birthday on the Fourth of July. With his son and grandson, we played catch and shared stories of the writing life. “I really do love to write, to pass along the wisdom and what God has taught me through story.”

Day #186—Joey Mellows spent 2018 traveling the world to watch and learn about baseball. “The best part of this year, besides watching all the games, is getting to know the people, seeing the joy that fans are getting from the game. It’s easy to get stuck in a rut. Sometimes, you just have to take a chance and see what happens.”

Day #187—The Muellers visited Springfield, turning my home into sleeping quarters for eleven people. Jake Mueller and his oldest son, Gabe, joined Sophie and me for catch at the park. Gabe described playing catch as “epic,” which I took as the highest of compliments.

Day #188—Jacob Brazeal is diligently working toward the rank of Eagle Scout. A freshman at Central High School, he created a fundraiser to restore Grant Beach Park. “I know it sounds big, but I want to raise \$30,000 to improve this field, so kids have a good place to play baseball and their parents can watch.” By day’s end, he had raised more than \$3,600.

Day #189—A former pitcher at Crowder College and Missouri Southern,

Ryan Verfurth organized a golf tournament to raise funds on behalf of his five-year-old nephew, who was undergoing treatment for stage 4 neuroblastoma at St. Jude Children's Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee. We played catch by the putting green before Dad and I competed in the tournament.

Day #190—With Jamie and Sophie out of town, Adam and Josh Lawrence connected with me and Kaylea for catch at the park. We spread out around the infield. The various distances and great disparity in height made playing catch an adventure in depth perception. Kaylea and I grabbed Dr Peppers on the way home. My bottle said, "Crave adventure."

Day #191—On day #6, before I had any idea what I was doing or what this project would become or where it would take me and my family, I played catch with Springfield's Thor. Today I played catch with his alter ego, Chris Taylor. Like Mr. Incredible, Chris also works in insurance, and his true gift is bringing smiles to people of all ages. Friends who are also superheroes are in short supply.

Day #192—Dan Ponder is a political science professor at Drury University specializing in presidents. But the St. Louis Cardinals fan quickly confessed, "If I could have done anything, I would have been a baseball player."

Day #193—Craigery Tucker, a friend from college at MSU, played catch with me on the hottest day in Springfield in the last four years. Craigery entertained me with his crazy story of traveling to play golf on the Old Course at St. Andrews. There is a certain kind of beauty in daring to do something crazy.

Day #194—Janelle Reed loves tacos and founded Single Momz Rock, a ministry birthed after she went through a divorce while raising two daughters. "Don't ever give up—you never know what's around the corner."

Day #195—Brian Brown went to California to be a sportswriter and almost signed up for a cultlike vegan-only community. He returned to Springfield, met his wife, started writing for *Springfield Business Journal*, considered becoming a political columnist, resigned because of a mystery illness, worked at a cemetery, and wants to try his hand at stand-up comedy.

Day #196—The same day Kaylea was touring cathedrals in Europe, I played catch with Heather. In the past year, Heather Whitford traveled the world as a missionary, crossing three continents and a dozen countries. “I could eat anything once.”

Day #197—With both daughters away from home, Jamie and I took a day trip to Bennett Spring State Park and almost hiked into a deer. On the way home, we stopped in Lebanon for catch at the same ballpark where I met Tanner (day #118).

Day #198—Eli Ponder is a student at Central High School and the catcher on the baseball team. He walked me through the team’s warmup procedures and let me practice pitching. Then we switched places and I caught his pitches.

Day #199—Rance Burger (day #32) volunteered his time and talent at a sports camp at Kingsway United Methodist Church. He invited me to come and tell stories of baseball and faith and agreed to pay me to play catch. After a story and multiple versions and rounds of catch, I had earned my pay: an ice-cold Dr Pepper.

Day #200—At Glenwood Park, in the midst of noisy construction and overcast skies, and with a toddler mesmerized by our skills, financial advisor and former rugby player Russ Pendleton and I played catch. Playing catch emphasizes living life fully in this moment, even amid all the distractions.

Day #201—After Sophie spent a week washing dishes, fixing meals, cleaning cabins, and going on a float trip, Jamie and I took a day trip to pick her up from Logan Valley Christian Retreat. I played catch with the founder and owner, Dave Williams. In a heat index of 110, the Cardinals fan and I sweated and swapped stories where the camp’s softball field used to be.

Day #202—Sarah Buxton is passionate about Jesus, serving others, and politics. Having learned at age fourteen that she has alopecia, she faces each day with a heart full of hope and courage whether or not there is hair on her head.

Day #203—Aaron Davis planted a church in Hawaii before moving back to Missouri. The chaplain at Ozarks Correctional Center, he has a sense

of humor combined with a gift for telling stories that makes for compelling books and sermons. “The most important thing I’ve learned is showing radical love to others. Radical love is more important than knowing and teaching exactly the right things.”

Day #204—Dad and I left for the *Field of Dreams* movie site. We connected with Joel Goldberg, the KC Royals pregame and postgame show announcer. “It’s all about relationships.”

Day #205—Nate Bukaty is the voice of *Sporting KC* on Sports Radio 810 WHB in KC. While Donald Trump was landing at Kansas City International Airport, Nate said, “Never burn any bridges. No matter how much you might feel slighted or wronged, never burn any bridges. When you’ve been treated unfairly, do the opposite. The positive comes back around. That’s true for all of life, too.”

Day #206—At the *Field of Dreams* with Dad, Bob Dyer, and Stan Sipka. No ghosts were seen, no voices heard. “I could live in Iowa,” Dad said.

Day #207—On the way home from *Field of Dreams*, Dad and I connected with Moonlight Graham. Tim Flattery hosts *The Moonlight Graham Show* and is preparing to play a game on the *Field of Dreams* with his baseball family against a team of all-stars from England, Ireland, and Scotland—the Fort Dodge Gypsum Eaters against the Kent Buccaneers.

Day #208—The Queen City Crush are sponsored by Fellowship of Christian Athletes and play in the Show-Me Collegiate League, a forty-game wood-bat league at U.S. Baseball Park. Logan Rycraft is a middle infielder who volunteered to play catch after devotions before the game. “God can do great things through broken people.”

Day #209—Aaron Unthank drove from Jacksonville, Florida, to Springfield, Missouri, on his way to Nashville, Tennessee, just to play catch with me.

Day #210—Brandon Smith moved to Springfield from Chicago to work in the travel industry. When he played baseball collegiately, he was the last person chosen for the travel team. He always had to wear the uniform of the previous day’s starting pitcher, which meant his uniform number changed daily, as did the position he played.

Day #211—Evie Kennedy, a soon-to-be second grader, greeted me in Royals Blue Crew gear. She wants to be a gymnastics teacher and loves the movie *Moana*.

Day #212—Adam Stoddard is a pastor of Hope and Anchor Church and runs 100-mile races. “When I push myself to a place I’ve never been before, experiencing discomfort and suffering, I can learn something about myself I’ve never known before. We truly find out who we are only when pushed to extremes.”

Day #213—Kristen Gammon was the president of my senior class at Kickapoo High School. We played catch on school property in memory of Mr. Nichols, our sophomore English teacher.

Day #214—Guy Newcomb is known throughout southwest Missouri and beyond for his Friday-night call-in radio show and website with scores posted from teams all over. The title of both his show and his Twitter handle are simple and brilliant: Scoreboard Guy.

Day #215—Sam Howard and I share a birthday month. Out in front of the Tower Theater where his dad is a deejay, Sam and I played catch while his sister Lilly added color commentary to his stories. She, too, got in on the catch playing.

Day #216—Hershel Wapp is a fifth-grader and a Royals fan, and played third base for the Regulators this summer. He likes to read the Goosebumps series and Harry Potter books and wants to be a journalist. His dad, “Almost Dr.” Jaymes Wapp, is the principal of a school in Conway, Missouri. My favorite piece of wisdom that Almost Dr. Wapp passed along originated with *his* dad: “When you get hit below the belt, hold your elbow.”

Day #217—At an open workout for the Grip ‘N’ Rip League, I convinced coach Justin Skinner to play catch in center field. Justin, a former Drury University player, coached his team to win the GRBL championship last year. He now works as a graphic artist at Prixel Creative. “Part of being creative is showing up every single day ready to work. Put in the time, do the hard work.”

Day #218—Jay Miller and I were classmates at Kickapoo taking

geometry and physics classes together and were soccer teammates our freshman year. Jay now teaches high school math and helps coach the track team. “Every deficiency you walk by, you’re setting a new standard.”

Day #219—Kody Cook works in the world of insurance and was willing to take a risk on a rainy-day catch. Neither one of us melted in the steady downpour. “Work hard and help others get what they need and you’ll find that your needs will also be met.”

Day #220—Kyle Moats is the athletic director at Missouri State University. “There is no substitute for hard work. That aspect of one’s character—the willingness to do hard work—carries over to all aspects of life.”

Day #221—Steve Pokin is a columnist for the *Springfield News-Leader*. He started writing in Springfield in March 2012 and is counting down to his one thousandth column. “I can make anything I write better by going over it again. I’m never at a point where I think it’s perfect. Anything I write, I can improve.”

Day #222—Don West, a freelance sports reporter and announcer, has called more than 3,600 games in the Springfield community and elsewhere. “Thirty-three years ago today, I did my first sports broadcast. When sports are your livelihood, everything you do is game prep. It just becomes part of who you are.”

Day #223—Chicago Cubs fan Andy Robertson is the sports reporter at the *Log Cabin Democrat* and plays softball regularly even though he tore a muscle in his throwing arm. He has visited Wrigley Field with his wife, and shared stories of sports, faith, and life.

Day #224—Lindsey Overman and her daughter Skylar are living big, one bucket-list item at a time. Skylar, who has schizencephaly, has written a book raising awareness of the rare condition and advocating further research. “Love makes all dreams possible.”

Day #225—Merry Yeager, a sports massage therapist specializing in neurokinetic therapy, gave me my first massage. Merry tests the strengths and weaknesses of paired muscles and then retrains the body through massage and follow-up exercises. “I really like helping people who are pushing

themselves, who are seeing just how far they can go. I'm hoping some of that grit is contagious."

Day #226—Ryan Miller is a financial-advising former catcher who used to attend Missouri State's catching clinics. As a high school student, Ryan got the opportunity to be on the receiving end of major league pitches. "Cut fastballs would break feet. It was a pretty incredible experience catching pitchers who throw that hard."

Day #227—On the first day of their senior years in high school, as soon as school let out, Kaylea Bryan, Asa Scott, and Carson Marquart joined me for catch at the park. Carson is on cabinet this year and gearing toward the blood drive next week. Asa is in debate, where he and I met a couple of years ago when I was a judge. I encouraged them to make the most of the year.

Day #228—Crystal Quade is the Missouri state representative for district 132. Crystal ran for office to bring a perspective to Jefferson City that was lacking—millennial, female, and a thorough understanding of living in poverty. For a few seasons, Crystal was on the Springfield Roller Derby team. Her derby name was J. F. Slay, in honor of J. F. K. Her number was 1960. She now keeps a pair of rollerskates in her Jefferson City office.

Day #229—Holly Hesse has been the head coach of the Missouri State University softball team for thirty years. She pitched in three consecutive College World Series, has coached the Bears to five NCAA tournament appearances, and was inducted into the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame this past January. "There is no better training ground than sports for developing life skills and making a difference in the lives of student athletes. Teamwork, hard work, attitude, selflessness, mental toughness—I just love competition."

Day #230—With KC, Koby, Isaiah, and Grady at the Defenders Baseball skills clinic for a new homeschool team, where I briefly considered starting a coaching career. Simply walking from the van to the field, however, I strained my back and also briefly considered not playing catch. Thank God for IcyHot and ibuprofen.

Day #231—A before-church game of catch with Harper Satterfield and his sister Radley in which we got kicked off the neighboring property because

they are starting a new business and don't have insurance yet for broken windows. We relocated to the church parking lot and didn't break any car windows.

Day #232—Kenyon Gerbrandt works for Literacy and Evangelism International in all things media related. His photo and video work has taken him around the world, interacting with new cultures and meeting amazing people and eating new foods. He said fried caterpillars taste like dirt, and I have no desire to confirm that.

Day #233—Judd Lasher turned his love of uniforms and logos into a simple hobby, creating sports memorabilia on mini football helmets, which is turning into a rapidly growing business—417 Helmets. “I recently did a Beatles helmet. The stripe down the middle was a few notes from ‘Hey Jude.’”

Day #234—According to Coach Hesse (day #229), “Sara Jones was the heart and soul of the [MSU softball] team. She is a phenomenal young woman.” Sara learned how to be that kind of teammate through tragedy. Her dad's car was hit by someone who was texting while driving. “Because of that accident,” Sara said while we played catch, “my perspective changed. I'm thankful the outcome truly is a best-case scenario—everyone is alive, everyone is okay. In fact, not too long ago Dad and I played catch. But it helped me reflect on the true purpose of the word *game*. A game brings joy, creates relationships, and pushes you to be a better you. You are so much more than the number on your back or your stat line. You are a human first.”

Day #235—In his thirteenth year with the Downtown Springfield Association, Rusty Worley tossed a ball with me on the historic square. He's traveled to twenty-seven MLB ballparks, lacking only Seattle, San Francisco, and Miami. “I try to live by the motto, ‘Bloom where you're planted.’ I look for ways to make a difference where I'm at today. If I'm taking care of things where I am today, tomorrow will take care of itself.”

Day #236—The day after announcing the first collegiate football game of 2018 on ESPN3, Corey Riggs agreed to a game of catch. Corey produces, directs, and announces sporting events across southwest Missouri on

Mediacom, ESPN3, and the Missouri State Bears Radio Network. “There is always a story to tell. I love shining a light on the high school kids who have hit the weight room and put in the work, watching them grind on the field.”

Day #237—Chris Bork is a middle-school physics teacher, volleyball coach, and photographer. A Cubs fan, he still rewatches highlights of the 2016 season; I know the feeling well from the previous year.

Day #238—Debra Lacy played softball in high school on a team called the Smooth Operators. On MLB’s Players Weekend, in the heat and humidity of late August, playing together after praying together is truly a fantastic way to start the week, to be sent out into the community to make new friends and discover their stories, too.

Day #239—Jackie Rehwald is the causes reporter for the *Springfield News-Leader*. “As a reporter, I get to know people who are so far out from my traditional circles, and that has really been amazing. Whenever I pop into their lives, usually something wonderful or something terrible has just happened to them. I get to share their stories, to meet people when they are in the middle of doing something incredible.”

Day #240—Jason Hynson is the executive director of Victory Mission, a faith-driven organization that provides emergency relief through outreach services and long-term empowerment through programming and social enterprise. “There are just so many people who think they’re done. They are worn out and tired and don’t feel they have a place anymore. But if someone can work with them for just a little bit, can walk alongside them and give them hope, they’ll see just how much they are needed. Second chance. New life.”

Day #241—For four years, Max has been a barista at Mudhouse Coffee to put into motion his dreams of being a professional animator. “Be a careless artist, but a ruthless editor.”

Day #242—Zach Cole is a senior at Springfield Catholic High School committed to playing baseball at Ball State University in Indiana, a Division 1 school in the Mid-American Conference. “If your dreams aren’t big enough that people laugh when they hear them, then you’re not dreaming

big enough. It's not how hard the dream will be to accomplish, it's how hard you work toward that dream."

Day #243—Tyler Jeske is Director of Baseball Operations for the Missouri State Bears baseball team. He helps coordinate equipment and video and analytics and travel all the while organizing a top-notch hitting clinic for baseball coaches. "We're just scratching the surface of everything we can learn from analytics."

Day #244—Joseph Oswalt is my brother-in-law and the best jump-scarer in the family. "*Baseball, Donuts, and Cheese Dip* could be the title of your next bestseller." I have to write a first bestseller first.

Day #245—Debra Lacy and her daughters, Marvalous and Verity, joined me for catch after worship. While holding her baby son, Lincoln, Debra caught the ball and glove-flipped it to Verity, who caught it and returned the throw to me. We played and celebrated that "God's mercy is wonderfully unfair," as we heard in the morning's sermon.

Day #246—Greg Hoskins is a firefighter and an EMT who transforms old, beat-up gloves into wallets, watchbands, purses, and dog toys. His grandfather was a master carpenter and passed along his wisdom and skills to Greg, who used to refurbish furniture. A Royals wallet from Hoskins Leather Craft now decorates my writing desk.

Day #247—Brent Gilstrap is a realtor and counselor who supports greatness and tries to make the world smaller, one new friend at a time. I was stranger #111 in his project to meet 365 strangers in a year. We played catch and I was able to join in his Taco Tuesday Crawl effort to eat tacos at every taco establishment in town. Catch was fantastic; tacos were meh.

Day #248—Ethan Forhetz is a journalist and news anchor who has experienced going viral multiple times. A fan of the Cardinals, he got to play and report on the fantasy camp experience, with Bob Forsch having a locker next to his. After catch, the battery in my van died. He drove home to get his jumper cables and made sure I was mobile before he left for work.

Day #249—Austin Kendrick is a testicular-cancer survivor and the

coach for the Parkview High School basketball and baseball teams. “Men, check yourself regularly. You just might save your life.”

Day #250—At the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, after a walking tour with president Bob Kendrick, playing catch with All-American Girls Professional Baseball League players Mary Moore and Terry McKinley Uselmann on the appropriately named Field of Legends.

Day #251—Taiki is a twenty-year-old student at Kokushikan University studying sports biomechanics, training, and conditioning. A fan of Shohei Ohtani and Yu Darvish, he was in Springfield to perform judo at the Japanese Fall Festival put on by the Springfield Sister Cities Association.

Day #252—Chris Jarratt is Creative Director at Revel Advertising. “Swing for the fences. Some people will think it’s awesome, and some won’t. You’ve just got to give it your best effort. You’ve gotta have a quarterback mentality. Pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and keep going.”

Day #253—Prolific sports announcer Tom Ladd met me at The FED, the baseball field of New Covenant Academy, and connected me with coach John Hartley and players Ryan Rogers and Ryan Carmack. The two seniors are committed to playing baseball collegiately and got a kick out of using the old Wilson.

Day #254—In 2002, Jason Hart spent ten days in the major leagues, accruing fifteen at bats for the Texas Rangers. In 2003, he played while a tumor grew in his brain. In 2004, Jason had surgery. Now the hitting coach for the Frisco RoughRiders, Jason played two more seasons in minor league ball to prove he could do it. “I think that if you respect the game, it will take care of you in the long run. Do the hard work and even if you don’t get what you’re shooting for, you can sleep well at night.”

Day #255—The Arc of the Ozarks held a party at my church, a barbecue and car wash for Arc workers. Jamil, Christopher, Harvey, and Scott all played catch with me in the parking lot, carefully avoiding the newly washed vehicles. “Working at The Arc teaches patience,” multiple people said. In our instant-everything culture of always faster, always now, patience is an often-forgotten virtue.

Day #256—Therapy catch with Aaron Unthank, who was in Springfield for his grandmother's funeral.

Day #257—Cody Pentecost is the GM of the Queen City Crush and is passionate about baseball and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. "I played for the Niagara Power and walked away with my life transformed. That summer was the first opportunity I was challenged to really live out my faith."

Day #258—Shaun Lamie came to Springfield and received a catch-playing tour of the Queen City.

Day #259—Shane Lamie woke up early for the second day of the catch-playing tour before braving all the rollercoasters of Silver Dollar City. I wore a Cubs jersey to honor losing a bet we had made.

Day #260—Just before her taekwondo lessons, under a setting sun and blue skies, Sophie played catch wearing a taekwondo gee and told me of her passion for creating art to sell in preparation for a school trip she is taking to Costa Rica.

Day #261—When I lived in Lee's Summit, I watched Caleb play baseball for his high school. Former Drury University outstanding shortstop, Caleb Cole is the assistant general manager for the brand-new Redline Athletics Youth Training Center.

Day #262—Dr. Bill Powers is in his first year as the principal of Kickapoo High School. "Every day is a new day, and you have to have grace, especially with young adults. Because there will be days when they feel like they are going through the worst day of their lives, they need to be reminded that it will be okay. Treat everyone with grace."

Day #263—I was invited to Conway High School on the first day of the Baseball Fall Classic to spend a day sharing catch-playing stories with elementary and high school students. After class, I played catch with assistant principal Tyler Vestal, followed by several members of the baseball team. I caught a bullpen session, warming up the starter and eventual game-winning pitcher, and threw out my first (and only) first pitch.

Day #264—On the day President Trump visited Springfield, I played catch with Missouri State University president Clif Smart while security

helicopters watched from above. Under Smart's leadership, MSU has set new enrollment records as well as increased retention and graduation rates. He gave great advice for parents of future college students: "Let them become independent. Give them some space to make decisions on their own. And let them trust their hearts and study something they really love."

Day #265—The morning of The Battle for Bell 3, Kameron Bell shared stories of her dad from a bullpen at the field at Glendale High School. "Dad was nice to everyone; it was just how he acted all the time. He stressed that we didn't know everything other people were going through and that being nice, being kind, is something we can always do. Making that extra effort to go out of your way and put a smile on someone's face can really make a big difference."

Day #266—Katrina High is an artist and comedienne and storyteller and librarian and owner of the rabbit Eleanor the Nibbler of Souls. I cannot wait to hear how she uses our game of catch as fodder for one of her routines.

Day #267—Ten-year-old Ethan Winget is a pitcher, middle infielder, and center fielder who loves the Harry Potter books and movies. He dreams of one day playing for the Royals, and I encouraged him to never, never give up.

Day #268—President of OneSource Insurance Group, Mark Acre is a former collegiate catcher and a St. Louis Cardinals fan who loves supporting and encouraging big dreams.

Day #269—Jeni Hopkins coached high school basketball for twenty-four years, accruing an impressive 332–206 record along the way. Her career coaching highlights include final four appearances, state runner-up and showmanship awards, and coaching some of the top talent in the country. We played catch in the radio studio parking lot before I appeared as a guest on her show, *A Coach's Perspective*.

Day #270—Played catch with Chandler Veit and his son Rylan, an eight-year-old who loves Cardinals players Yadier Molina and José Martinez. Chandler played baseball at Mansfield High School and told me stories of pitching against rival high schools and playing all nine positions his senior season.

Day #271—Ben Hammitt played baseball collegiately for Oklahoma Christian University and now plays in the local Grip 'N' Rip League on Sundays in the fall. A fan of Nolan Ryan—"I saw him pitch his last game"—Ben helps coach baseball during his free time. "There's just something about this game and the way it brings people together."

Day #272—At the Ballparks of America in Branson, Missouri, five different MLB fields from across the country are created in turf to replicate. Kyler Rose from Overland Park, Kansas, caught me fiddling with the old Wilson and asked, "Is that Shoeless Joe Jackson's glove?" He suggested this book be titled *A Baseball Year*.

Day #273—Matt McCoy patrolled center field for my Kickapoo High School baseball team. He's now a chaplain for Faith Hospice of the Ozarks, and we played catch on the last day of MLB's regular season. "I get the privilege to be reminded of what is most important each encounter I have with those who are dying. Over the course of the past several years, one of the things I'm learning is that regardless of whether I agree with you, we can still be friends."

Day #274—Kyndal Hawkins is a photographer on the go. She is slowly working on her new home so she can live in a van down by the river. Literally. A white cargo van transformed on the inside to be a home, complete with solar power and running water. "I love to travel and explore this big world we live in."

Day #275—Holly Fees was a paraprofessional in Jamie's classroom the second year Jamie taught and has become a dear family friend. She brought Dr Pepper and chocolate cake and her glove to dinner. "There's just something about baseball compared to other sports, but it's hard to describe. Like a feeling of home."

Day #276—Rick Theule took a road trip with his son to meet some internet friends in real life—a 2,560-mile road trip. "I forgot to pack my glove," he confessed upon arriving at Chez Bryan. A Detroit Tigers fan, Rick knows what it takes to start and finish something. "If I want to, if I put my mind to it, there's nothing I can't do. Which is cool, but also scary. The question is, 'Do I really want to do it?'"

Day #277—On a break from college while he decides which direction to go next, Noah Theule is learning to live with the daily courage and freedom to truly be himself. Keep searching the skies and dreaming big, Noah!

Day #278—Mark Goodwin attended Delaware Elementary School with me and was the goalie on the YMCA soccer team Dad coached. And then I learned that Aaron from Florida (day #170) is his cousin. What a small, small world.

Day #279—Missouri State's baseball team had their alumni game, and I figured if I packed a couple of gloves, I should be able to find someone willing to play catch with me. Tim Northern and Raj Suresh are stand-up comics who were in Springfield to perform and dropped by the game to pass some time. They gave me an education in comedy, cricket, and the courage to make new friends.

Day #280—Mike Hudgens is the photographer for the Grip 'N' Rip Baseball League, the men's wood-bat league at U.S. Baseball Park in Ozark, Missouri. "I'm just trying my best to capture everything, to make these guys look better than they really are. Really, all these guys are great guys. Their talent is secondary to who they are as people. They are what makes this league great."

Day #281—Jerry Elliott attended the 2018 Royals Alumni Fantasy Camp in Surprise, Arizona. At eighty-one years of age, Jerry played both infield and outfield and drove in his team's first run of the camp. He was awarded the trophy for Most Inspirational Player on Team Black.

Day #282—Creekside at Elfindale is an independent living retirement community. Bethany Burrows is Life Enrichment Coordinator at Creekside and asked if I'd be interested in sharing stories and playing catch. Ken, Martha, Mark, and Bethany all participated in the catch above the dining room.

Day #283, Part 1—Brian Rose, Kyler's dad (day #272), was in Springfield and wanted to see how it felt playing catch with an old glove. Brian was a second baseman who then played outfield and now helps coach both of his sons. Sharply dressed and coming straight from a presentation with Mercy Hospitals, Brian swung by my house before starting the return trip home.

Day #283, Part 2—Ryan Wolfe (day #100) and I played catch as we talked about getting the chance to play in the championship game of the Grip 'N' Rip League. We finalized plans to have a catch-playing World Series watch party at CY Sports Center.

Day #284—I had volunteered to help at Missouri State University's 38th Annual Children's Literature Festival. More than seventeen hundred students from twenty-four schools across southwest Missouri gathered to be inspired by and educated about the wonderful ways words are crafted into books. Author Antony John and MSU junior Shannon played catch with me at the break.

Day #285—Caleb and Kerry Davis are part of the weekday crew of the Bryan Family *Millennium Falcon*. After school and in the rain, a game of catch to welcome in the weekend.

Day #286—Justin Snider is the head coach of the Clever High School baseball team. He's coached one player in this year's College World Series finals and a pitcher who earned a September call-up with the Astros. "In a high school of 340 students, we've had twenty athletes go on to play college baseball in the last eight years."

Day #287—Tony Lewis is the founder and commissioner of the Grip 'N' Rip Baseball League. During the sixth inning of the championship game, after taking a swing off a tee as part of a gender reveal party (blue!), we played catch.

Day #288—Chloe Merced is the shortstop on the Kickapoo High School fastpitch softball team. She also is a forward on the basketball team and runs sprints and throws the shot put on the track team. She hit her first grand slam just a couple of weeks ago, securing a sizable Kickapoo victory, but didn't keep the ball. Her great-grandfather is Bill Virdon (day #61). "He just tells me to stay humble."

Day #289—Dr. Andrew Cline is a professor of media and journalism at Missouri State University and an award-winning documentary filmmaker with Carbon Trace Productions. He's working on a project capturing the mental health crises of the children in the middle of the Syrian war.

Day #290—Matt Bahun grew up in Omaha, Nebraska, going to the College World Series. When he played baseball in college, he once competed against Albert Pujols. “He hit a home run against us that was still rising when it cleared the fence. That ball was hit so hard it broke tree branches.”

Day #291—Tom Hanks was wrong; there is crying in baseball. At the age of four, Cy went viral as the Saddest Little Cardinals Fan after a video was posted showing how upset he was at the Cardinals’ lack of postseason success in 2012. Kris, Emily, Karen, and Bill Virdon joined in the game of catch following a baseball storytelling event.

Day #292—David Pennington is the fire chief of Springfield. “Collaboration is extremely powerful. Amazing things happen if you’re willing to collaborate.”

Day #293—For seven years, Derrick Docket was the social-media genius of the Missouri Valley Conference, covering every team in the valley. Ten collegiate teams. Eighteen sports. All by himself. “When you do a job you like, it’s not really a job. It was a grind, of course, but I really liked it.”

Day #294—For a hobby job, Lindy Snider works as an associate scout for the Los Angeles Dodgers. He started out scouting for the Colorado Rockies from 1994 through 2001 and has been with the Dodgers ever since. “The most important thing as a player is consistency. Are you consistently practicing properly, being a good teammate, throwing the ball right? The second most important thing is attitude. What is your daily attitude? Do you have the right mindset? In baseball, there are so many games, and every day you have to have the proper attitude.” Bob Snider, Lindy’s dad and a veteran of the Korean War, put on his Nokona glove that looked just like my old Wilson and tossed me the ball a few times—my first game of catch with a nonagenarian.

Day #295—Chandler is a senior at Ozark High School, plays second base for the team, and works at CY Sports. “This game is all about failure. You have to pick yourself up and keep going. If you dwell on it too long,

you're setting yourself up for another mistake. Keep doing the hard work. Put in what you want to receive back."

Day #296—CY Sports hosted a World Series watch party. Seth Conner works in the Dodgers organization as the first base and hitting coach for the Great Lakes Loons, the Low-A team. He'll be heading to the World Series on Friday and predicted the Dodgers to win in seven.

Day #297—With Josh Kennedy's fifth- and sixth-grade classroom, the largest game of catch of the year: forty-two students.

Day #298—Patrick Queensen started Phelps Grove Outfitters to capture the creative spirit of Missouri one T-shirt at a time. He made Catch 365 T-shirts to support Springfield's Miracle League and to "Spread MO Love."

Day #299—Emily Weil is a Royals fan getting married to a Cardinals fan. On her wedding day, the same date that Don Denkinger made the infamous call of the 1985 World Series, we played catch and were joined by a dog named Egypt.

Day #300—For more than twenty-five years, Bob Reynolds was my parents' neighbor. He moved to a new neighborhood two years ago, and joined my family for a World Series watch party. My second game of catch with a nonagenarian.

Day #301—Carrie West, a Cardinals fan and my sister-in-law, had reconstructive shoulder surgery in high school and was the first person to employ a designated thrower, Christina Mossbarger. I threw the ball to Carrie, who caught it and flipped it to Christina, who threw it back to me. Christina's throwing arm was sore, however, because of the completion of a seven-hour tattoo session, finishing the sleeve on her right arm.

Day #302—At CY Sports, with David the junior pitcher from Glendale High School and Luke the "everything but catcher" sophomore from Kickapoo High School.

Day #303—Byron Hagler coached high school baseball for twenty-eight seasons, accruing all of baseball's best accolades, including back-to-back state championships. He's returning for his ninth season as the part-time assistant

pitching coach at Drury University, where he coached Miami Marlins pitcher Trevor Richards for three seasons. “I would like to dedicate playing catch to Mom.”

Day #304—Brock Phipps is the head groundskeeper at Hammons Field, home of the Double-A Springfield Cardinals. For the eighth consecutive year, Hammons Field was named the 2018 Texas League Field of the Year. Brock also won the Texas League Turf Manager of the Year. “I’ve learned a lot about patience. I have no control over Mother Nature.”

Day #305—Clark “Moose” Nungester stopped in Springfield on his way to Arkansas from Kansas City. The rain stopped as soon as he hit the city limits. He encouraged me through stories of some of my favorite Royals players: Alex Gordon, Kevin Seitzer, and Buck O’Neil.

Day #306—Brian and Rachele Huett volunteer multiple times each week at Miracle League. For the last five years, Brian has pitched and Rachele has been his battery mate. They connected to the league through an article in the newspaper and love bringing joy and making new friends through the game.

Day #307—CY Sports Center hosted a collegiate baseball showcase. Keilynn, almost nine years old, was there to support his brother, Logan, a senior at Hollister who hopes to play next year. While aluminum bats pinged next to us, we played catch and strutted our abilities in front of the gathered collegiate coaches.

Day #308—Nya Jo Morgan hits home runs. For the last four years, she’s been hitting homers at Ozark High School, setting a couple of school records in the process. Next year she’ll be hitting homers at Southwest Baptist University. A catcher, Nya knows about leadership. “I know the importance of being a team player and not being bossy, but sometimes you have to say something.”

Day #309—In 2008, Ryan Howerton was the Southwest Missouri Player of the Year. The former quarterback from the University of Missouri now coaches at Redline Athletics. “If you don’t let other people help, you won’t be as good as you could be.”

Day #310—Coach Allen Gum is the head baseball coach at the University of Central Arkansas. While Kaylea toured the university, Coach Gum encouraged us with catch, free T-shirts, and an inspirational story about marbles.

Day #311—On the day we were scheduled to play catch, in the wee hours of the morning, there were multiple murders in Springfield. Since he is Springfield's chief of police, Chief Paul Williams notified me of his unavailability to meet as well as his desire to reschedule. We played catch today. "They're behind bars now," he said. New to the job, police spokeswoman Jasmine Bailey also joined in.

Day #312—Matt Vereen earned his journalism degree and moved to Springfield in July, where he is now the sports anchor at KOLR-10. "I like the stories of sports. Sports melts away a lot of the issues of the world and focuses in on one single moment. But the issues of the 'real world' are also played out through sports. In those moments, when you see the issues on the field, is where the journalism of sports journalism comes through."

Day #313—Bridgette Robles is a George Washington University graduate with a master's degree in strategic public relations. Bridgette also loves the stories that sports tell, interacting with fans on various social-media platforms, joining in as a bandwagon fan when necessary. She dreams of working in the communications department in professional baseball.

Day #314—Orioles fan Jim Doherty was chosen as one of the best EMTs in the Ozarks by *Springfield Business Journal*. On the day a new record low temperature was set, he told me of the adventures of the job. "Every day is different. That's what makes this job so much fun; no two days are the same. It's almost impossible to answer what I'll see over any given two weeks. Everything from 'Help! I've fallen and I can't get up' to heart attacks and strokes. I've even helped deliver three babies—the last one was breech."

Day #315—Matthew Bahun is seven and dreams of playing for the Royals, taking over Salvador Perez's position as catcher.

Day #316—Chris Brammer, the choir director from day #11, was the

first person to notify me that I was an MLB.com notification. Today, in the middle of a steady November snowfall, he shared stories of the Alaskan cruise and vacation he and his wife took in July, which he had won. “The weather was absolutely perfect. We saw big brown bears much closer than you would want to see big brown bears.”

Day #317—Dan Molloy is a Chicago White Sox fan and KOLR-10 sports anchor. Until he gets married, Dan is claiming October 26, 2005, as the best day of his life. On that day, the White Sox swept the Astros in the World Series, winning the championship for the first time in eighty-eight years. “I remember watching it with Dad, getting the big hug when it was over. It’s just one of those memories that’s burned into my brain.”

Day #318—Rick Grayson is one of the best PGA teaching professionals in the country. He loves the Masters and the Royals and uses golf to spread joy throughout the community. Rick was inducted into the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame for outstanding contributions in the sport of golf and also was chosen as one of *Springfield Business Journal’s* 2018 Men of the Year. “I begin every day by thinking, ‘Jack Nicklaus is coming in for a golf lesson.’ I want to act and treat others in such a way as if they are Jack Nicklaus.”

Day #319—Reverend Andy Bryan, of no relation that we could discover, is a seventh-generation Methodist pastor and Royals fan. “My first master’s degree is in music, and I did that for five years. That’s where I learned the most important thing—God’s call is unique on each individual. Don’t try to compare what God wants you to be doing to what someone else is doing. God’s calling you to do something unique. I’m grateful for those years to discern that uniqueness of my call.”

Day #320—Josh Payton, also catch partner on day #81, had surgery in August. Josh’s stay turned from one night into four. His lung collapsed, his oxygenation levels dropped, and his pain was unmanageable. “I can’t describe how scary it was to not be able to breathe and be in excruciating pain.” I was thankful my friend was healthy again.

Day #321—Jimmy first learned how to do art in prison. He’s now using his art to give hope to others, doing drawings during worship services at his

church. “I pray over each piece and trust that God is going to lead me to give it to the right person. God is doing good things. I have hope for the future.”

Day #322—As a junior at what was then called Southwest Missouri State University, Dick posted a 7–2 record with a 0.59 ERA—second best in the nation that year. Dick Jones is now the executive director of A Sporting Chance, which is celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary. “ASC is here to be a positive force in the community, and we’re doing it through sports.”

Day #323—Chandler and Wyatt were working out at CY Sports Center a week after national signing day. Both are holding on to collegiate baseball aspirations. Baseball dreaming during football season.

Day #324—Doug Hatridge was the assistant superintendent for the Fort Osage School District when Albert Pujols moved to town. Doug’s job was to make sure Albert could legally attend school. “Albert was a genuinely nice kid and humble. He never complained. He always said ‘yes, sir’ and ‘no, sir.’ I’m not sure he ever missed a day of school.”

Day #325—Miracle Nic Fugitt has an amazing fastball. A Royals fan, an Alex Gordon fan, and an Elvis fan, Nick has Pelizaeus-Merzbacher disease—an extremely rare genetic disease that affects the myelin covering the nerves in the brain. There are less than fifteen hundred cases of PMD in the world. Nic is also full of contagious hope and talks of the day when he gets to heaven. “I’ll walk and my first dance will be with Jennifer. I will play baseball and basketball and go fishing with my great-grandpa.”

Day #326—On Thanksgiving Day, after brisket and cheesy corn and green beans and rolls and before Jamie’s homemade apple pie, in my parents’ back yard, I played catch with Dad and Kaylea and Sophie and Jamie.

Day #327—Jennifer, Chris, and Karsen Schumaker were in Springfield to celebrate Thanksgiving, run in the Turkey Trot, take a Hotel Vandivort selfie, and play catch. Jennifer crafts as The Little Wing to raise money for pediatric cancer research in honor of her nephew who died from acute myeloid leukemia two years ago.

Day #328—When he was in college, Topher Williams pitched until he couldn’t throw the ball to home plate. He now plays on multiple travel

softball teams because he can't get away from the game. "This game teaches respect for others."

Day #329—Springfield was under a wind advisory. Brothers Jaden and Asher Cooper and their cousins, Gabe and Landon Taylor, agreed to play catch in crazy curveball-inducing winds. After filling our bellies with hot dogs and chili, the four cousins and I walked to "the ditch" for catch and were joined by dad Gary Cooper and Sophie.

Day #330—Eric Lenz plays bass in the band at my church. Thanks to this catch-playing year, we learned that we are neighbors. We played catch while his across-the-street neighbor split firewood on his porch. "I keep my glove in my car, just in case my grandson wants to play catch."

Day #331—Ned Reynolds has been a sports broadcaster for sixty years. "Everyone I encountered on my broadcasting journey told me to be myself. And I've found those words to be true. Be yourself. Don't imitate others. And don't take yourself too seriously, either. You've gotta roll with the punches."

Day #332—Yankees fan and glove relacer Justin Perkins helped me track down gloves to donate as Christmas gifts to area kids. "I just can't pass up a chance to hook a kid up with a glove. Baseball is a big thing in my house."

Day #333—From 5:30 to 10 a.m., the morning show on 104.7 The Cave is hosted by Mike the Intern. Mike is an MSU grad and Chiefs fan with a degree in mass media production. He once won a contest taking a thousand selfies with a thousand different people in one month.

Day #334—Scott Bailes is a nine-year MLB veteran pitcher. In 1988, on opening day in Cleveland, Scott pitched a complete-game, three-hit shut-out against the Baltimore Orioles facing the likes of Cal Ripken Jr., Eddie Murray, and Fred Lynn. "Baseball teaches you to be humble, above and beyond anything else. Don't ever believe people when they try and tell you how good you are. You're never as good as your good days. You're never as bad as your bad days. Just stay humble."

Day #335—Mark West is a musician and the owner of Downhome Productions. His CD, *Songs of the Game*, is the perfect soundtrack for Catch 365. The CD includes baseball songs by Tony Orlando, Kerry and

Tracy Cole (of The Lefty Brothers), Randle Chowning (founder of Ozark Mountain Daredevils), John Schlitt (of Petra), and Bob Walkenhorst (of The Rainmakers).

Day #336—For twenty years, The Finish Line was the locally-owned sporting goods store in Springfield, and Dick Pogue was the owner. “We weren’t making any money and I was working seventy hours a week, but I loved it. I miss the people.”

Day #337—Dr. Joanna Cemore Brigden, an associate professor at MSU, understands the importance of play because she is a board member for both the America Association for the Child’s Right to Play and The Association for the Study of Play. “Play is vital for healthy living, for enjoying life. People don’t realize how important play is. It’s vital for happiness. Everybody needs play in their life.”

Day #338—Since 2005, Mark Harrell has been the photographer for the Double-A Springfield Cardinals. He also drove in the first two runs ever scored in the history of the Kickapoo High School baseball program. “To tell you the truth, what I’ve learned is that everyone is human. Celebrities, athletes, everyone. We’re just fully human, and that’s a good thing.”

Day #339—Bethany Burrows organized my game of catch on day #282 at Creekside. The life enrichment coordinator knows how important stories and play are for all ages. “We tend to get caught up with our to-do lists. It is so important to take the time to completely relate to each person, living out, as much as possible, that whoever is in front of you at that moment is the most important person in your life.”

Day #340—Clint Gerlek now works at iHeartRadio. The former college pitcher played baseball at San Diego State on Tony Gwynn Field while Tony Gwynn was the head coach. “Ideas breed ideas. Share your ideas when you have them and good things happen.”

Day #341—Three years after undergoing Tommy John surgery, while pitching for MSU, Nick Petree was named the 2012 Louisville Slugger National Player of the Year—the best collegiate baseball player in the

country. It's testament to his attitude and what baseball has taught him about life. "Baseball is a hard game. It's just like life. Not everything goes your way. But you learn how to deal with adversity in such a way as to take positives from it. In life, if you can learn to look for the positives when negative things happen, when it seems that nothing is going your way, you'll avoid that emotional rollercoaster."

Day #342—Brett Holmes was drafted by the Pittsburgh Pirates in the twentieth round. He played thirty-four games in the Class-A Short Season New York–Penn League for the Williamsport Crosscutters. That first year, his team won the championship. The grandson of Bill Virdon (day #61), Brett still loves the game. "Baseball teaches you to trust those around you. You don't have to do everything on your own. You have teammates who are there to pick you up."

Day #343—Morgan Goss is a freshman at Kickapoo High School, a southpaw first baseman and pitcher who dreams of hitting the field for the MSU Bears in a few years. His best day on the field came a couple of years ago. "I went 5–5 with three doubles and a pair of singles and got the walk-off hit. It was a pretty good game."

Day #344—Scott Nasby is in his seventh season as the head coach of the Drury University baseball team. He played in the College World Series in 2003 as a part of the MSU team and spent the summer of 2006 in Italy coaching the Godo Knights baseball team.

Day #345—Marty Willadsen is the executive vice president for the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame. He's the person responsible for planning and executing all HOF events, like the Sports Enthusiasts Baseball Luncheon back on day #144. "It's a new job every day. This job teaches you how important it is to be nice to people."

Day #346—Paul Evans is entering his thirty-first year as the pitching coach for Missouri State University. He has worked with thirteen pitchers on their way to the major leagues. "Like anything in life, baseball is ultimately about relationships."

Day #347—Haleigh Johnson knows all the players on the Cardinals

team, and they know her, too. A southpaw shortstop, Haleigh has a near-perfect memory, peppering me with questions about favorite players from across the league.

Day #348—I was invited back to Conway High School to witness the Hamels Foundation ceremony of giving cleats as a Christmas gift to the baseball and softball teams. Coach Clay Bilyeu has been the head coach of the baseball team for thirteen years. A catcher, he graduated from Conway in 2000 and was part of the Class 2A District 11 Baseball Championship teams in 1997 and 2000. This past fall, Coach Bilyeu won his 400th game against Morrisonville on the other day I went to Conway High School to play catch (day #263).

Day #349—Bethany Bishop played both basketball and softball—catcher and third base, bless her knees. Yesterday, she celebrated her three-year anniversary at People Centric Consulting Group, where she works as an operations specialist. “I empower people to take ownership of the things they do and work in their strengths. Don’t let fear stop you. You can’t be afraid to ask questions or take a risk.”

Day #350—Before church, I played catch with Adam Lawrence and listened to his adventures of driving all over the Midwest. After church, I played catch with Evie and Sophie. Evie talked about needing a new glove. Sophie demonstrated her own improved throwing skills from this year. After lunch, Kaylea and I swung by Kickapoo to play catch and process college decisions. The more she talked, the greater the distances her throws covered.

Day #351—Greg Fisher knows what it feels like to tear a rotator cuff. He declined having surgery and simply let it heal on its own. A Royals fan, he plays catch regularly with his nephews. “I don’t try and throw as hard as I used to, but I can still throw.”

Day #352—Brad Zweerink, a friend from elementary school days, is a freelance photographer who connected me to Rachel Johnson, the director of exhibits and programming for the Springfield Regional Arts Council. In preparation for a book-launch party, we played catch and talked of baseball in Boston.

Day #353—Justin Perkins (day #332) gave new life to the old George Brett glove. New padding and blue laces, and it is good to go for another year of playing catch.

Day #354—Brian McHaney was my catcher in high school. Brian has hypertrophic cardiomyopathy and collapsed during a game his junior year. He now works at Delaware Elementary School, encouraging students and teachers alike. “You always threw strikes. Never hurt my hand, but you always threw strikes.”

Day #355—Chris Ballard hoped his sons would learn one lesson as they hiked fourteeners and camped in the mountains of Colorado. He now pastors at Story Church, a calling which radically affects all parts of his life. “You can do hard things. I didn’t know then what I know now. I am capable of so much more. I just have to push through the hard times.”

Day #356—Kirk Nungester had to have Tommy John surgery after his junior year in high school. He moved to the outfield and kept hitting, getting a game-winning double in his first collegiate at bat. “Every time you step on the field, you get to feel like a kid again.”

Day #357—Howard Greenwood coached baseball in Nixa, Missouri, for twenty-two years. “You cannot underestimate the power of encouragement. Encouraging a kid takes them a lot farther along to reaching their potential.” His son, Patrick, now coaches in Clayton, Missouri. “Even the bad days on the field are good ones, but it is kinda hard to forget those 22–2 losses,” Patrick said.

Day #358—In the winter of 1997, Alan Mahaffey was selected by the Chicago Cubs in the Rule 5 draft. He spent spring training 1998 in the major league camp. He stayed with the team until the last day of spring training. “I had a lot of my best days on the field. From the time I was a kid, I wanted to be a professional baseball player. I was doing what I wanted to do, chasing that dream, and did everything I could to make it. I got the chance to pitch against some of the best in the game and have no regrets.”

Day #359—On Christmas Day, I played catch with my brother-in-law, Cory West. Now a pastor and high school teacher in Pearland, Texas,

Cory has the heart of a coach. “I want to help them think through their games. They need to be fully present for every point. The relationships you develop with the students through the practices and games is the best part of the job.”

Day #360—The Spangler family—Sam, Emily, Anya, Kai, and Eden—are friends from when my family and I lived in Lee’s Summit. Catching up through stories of life and the passage of time while playing catch is a much better and more beautiful way to connect than social media.

Day #361—Phil Hockensmith was in the army for twenty-one years and retired in 1992 as a lieutenant colonel and an infantry officer as a Russian specialist before teaching high school history classes at Kickapoo. “Baseball is such a complicated sport, and I can appreciate that. I was trained as an officer to always be looking ahead to the next battle. Managers can’t just be thinking about this at bat and this pitch, but also the innings to come. We live in a world where things are changing faster than anyone could imagine, and young people need to be adaptable and flexible.”

Day #362—Brett Johnston is the founder of Compass Rose, a business that creates enriching musical experiences throughout Springfield. “Helping connect musicians to play in their spaces, curating events, has been great. Patience is the key.”

Day #363—Erica Leak traveled the country in college studying architecture. Now in Austin, she is bringing light to the world through the city’s affordable-housing program. “There are a lot of challenges that go along with a city that is vibrant and changing. I’m helping manage that change and trying to make it a better place, a more equitable city.”

Day #364—In March 2017, Billy Conway officially started Squints Apparel, making T-shirts inspired by life in Kansas City and the epic baseball movie *The Sandlot*. When the Buck O’Neil Education and Research Center was vandalized, Billy designed a special T-shirt and donated all proceeds from the sales to the restoration process.

Day #365—The Last Day of the 2018 Catch-Playing Tour of Kansas City: Dave Darby, Chris Browne, Darwin Pennye, Jeff Passan, Brandon

Nichols, Jesse McDaniel, Leslie Guyton, Alexis Guyton, Sabrina Guyton, Jake Mueller, Gabe Mueller, Brenna Mueller, Gracie Mueller, Katrina High, Kaylea Bryan, Sophie Bryan, and Nash High.

The end.