

## Baseball Season in Belmar, New Jersey

by David Bachner

In Spring I migrate north like an old salmon,  
north up the Pike to Memorial Field,  
where my baseball memories were spawned.  
I walk the field's four diamonds,  
circling the expanse of hot dust and dry grass,  
of sun-cracked base paths and dirty dugouts.

We played in the shadow of Satchel Paige,  
who legends say threw no-hitters here,  
and Josh Gibson, who blasted a ball six-hundred feet,  
over Main Street and into the post office backyard.  
Or maybe it was that the Black Babe Ruth's foul ball landed  
in a passing freight car that carried it six-hundred miles.  
I'm not sure. Kids' stories. Six hundred something.

I remember Denny Gallagher, admired by all  
for his talent and chatter and buoyant swagger.  
And Douglas Dern—dull, lazy, snarly—  
whose misplays and oafishness we derided.  
And Mike Ferragamo, whose Big-League arm  
launched throws like spears that stung my palm  
even through the padding of my new Ewell Blackwell mitt.

And I can still hear our cheering mothers,  
proud of their beautiful boys' heroics—  
*Good try, Dear. You almost caught it—*  
and the irate shouts of our over-heated fathers  
lambasting our failures and correcting our imperfections—  
*Quit stepping in the bucket, Buddy Boy. Don't be such a chicken.*

Returning to Memorial Field, I'm back in those admixture days  
of camaraderie and rivalry, of winning and losing,  
of manic bravado and insecurity, those days we cared  
only about playing, playing through temperate Spring melting  
into blazing Summer then chilling, slowly, into frigid Fall.  
Until that day we traded tee shirts for coats  
and were forced, finally, to end our season.

Today Spring is budding on Memorial Field.  
I watch two boys playing catch, warming up  
before their friends arrive for the first day of practice,  
this first day of their long season of games.  
Playing, just playing, will be all that matters.  
The memories will come much later.