

## **Open Field**

by Tom Lagasse

My childhood friends and I were thrown together by chance as the grandchildren of farmers and lumberjacks who had left the fields and woods of Northern New England seeking a better life for their families by working in dark, cavernous factories making brass, clocks, and springs in the blue-collar town we now called home.

We filled our summer days with play, discovery, mischief, but mostly baseball. Our crew cut through the tidy yards of unsuspecting neighbors, and squeezed between the old, barbed wire fence. We were greeted by the meadow's fresh cut grass, the only parcel the elderly farmer had yet to sell but kept mowed like an invitation. A windbreak of apple trees, unpruned and wild, with ripening, imperfect fruit, transformed into a tangled fence for our makeshift diamond.

We made do with our gear, which like our clothes, were hand me downs: broken bats, nailed or taped together, re-laced gloves, old rags for bases, and a few battered baseballs. Johnny and Jimmy, the best of us, were the captains, who picked the teams, four on four, four on five, if necessary. We negotiated ground rules, sometimes as we went along. We played until dark.

Free of the stale classrooms and from our stay-at-home moms' watchful eyes, we learned to love the game. Between innings and at bats, we discovered silence, and the natural world around us. One day we stopped to witness a hawk fly overhead with a mouse clutched in her talons. In the outfield I roamed between pitches with my imagination beyond the neighborhood's short porch horizon to places I knew like Boston, New York, Chicago, and San Francisco but had never visited.

Was there something in our DNA, our collective unconscious that could not distinguish between work and play, that called us to this farmer's open field? Perhaps the ineffable yearning in our young hearts which churned beyond the intellect's reasoned score. The passion and joy we carried as we explained those days to our parents and grandparents until they disappeared when all of it was sold, drawing us towards loss and nostalgia, like picking apples in autumn.