

Read the next two selections and answer the questions that follow.

## Jim at Bat

*from Jim the Boy  
by Tony Earley*

- 1 A summer pasture at twilight:
- 2 The boy cannot hit the baseball to his satisfaction. Though he makes contact almost every time he swings the bat, he does not strike the mighty blow he sees in his mind. The ball does not leap scalded into the sky, but hops into the tall grass as if startled by a noise; it buzzes mildly, a dying beetle tied to a piece of thread, and rolls to a disappointing stop.
- 3 Uncle Zeno pitches. He tracks the ball into the grass every time the boy hits it, and retrieves it without complaint from each new hiding place. He blames himself for the boy's lack of success. The bat is simply too heavy. He knew this for fact when he bought it; he had not wanted to buy a new bat every time the boy grew an inch. He silently chides himself for being cheap.
- 4 Uncle Coran and Uncle Al man the field at improbably optimistic distances behind their brother. Their faces are indistinct in the coming darkness, their forms identical except that Uncle Coran wears a baseball glove on his left hand, while Uncle Al, who is left-handed, wears one on the right. They shout encouragement each time the boy swings the bat. They pound their fists into their gloves, though only for their nephew's benefit; their bodies no longer believe the ball will ever make it out to their place in the field. They do not creep closer because it would make the boy feel bad.
- 5 All three of the uncles wear the small, pocketless, old-fashioned baseball gloves they have had since they were boys. Uncle Al's mitt was made for a right-handed fielder, but he has worn it on the wrong hand for so long that he no longer notices that it doesn't fit. Each uncle would still gladly play a game of baseball, should anyone ask, although no one has asked for years. They keep their tiny, relic gloves properly oiled, however, as if such invitations were not only commonplace, but imminent.
- 6 The boy studies Uncle Zeno until Uncle Zeno's face seems to light up from the inside, weakly, like a moon seen through clouds. It changes into a hundred unfamiliar faces, twists into a hundred strange smiles, until the boy blinks hard and wills his eyes to see only what is there.
- 7 "Okay, Doc," Uncle Zeno says. "Keep your eye on the ball. Here it comes."
- 8 The baseball in Uncle Zeno's hand is almost invisible, a piece of smoke, a shadow. The woods on the far side of the pasture are already dark as sleep;

the river twists through them by memory. Uncle Zeno tosses the ball gently toward the boy, who does not see it until its arc carries it above the black line of trees, where it hangs for a moment like an eclipse in the faintly glowing sky. The boy is arm-weary; he swings as hard as he is able. The bat and ball collide weakly. The ball drops to the ground at the boy's feet. It lies there stunned, quivering, containing flight beneath its smooth skin. The boy switches the bat into his left hand, picks up the ball with his right, and throws it back to Uncle Zeno.

- 9 "I hit it just about every time," the boy says.
- 10 "Batter, batter, batter, batter," Uncle Al chirps in the field.
- 11 "Say, whatta-say, whatta-say, whatta-say," chants Uncle Coran in the ancient singsong of ballplayers. The uncles are singing to the boy. He has never heard anything so beautiful. He does not want it to stop.
- 12 "Okay, Doc," says Uncle Zeno. "One more. Now watch."

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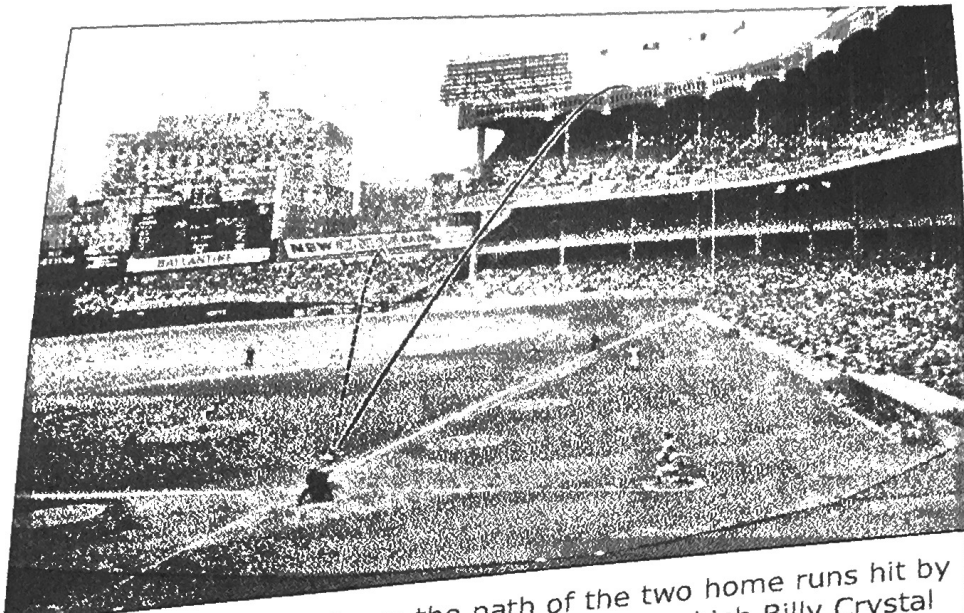
# A Crystal-Clear Love Affair

from *Memories of Yankee Stadium*  
by Scott Pitoniak



© AP/Bill Kostroun

- 1 May 30, 1956, remains indelibly etched in Billy Crystal's mind.
- 2 That was the day the future actor, comedian, and director attended his first game at Yankee Stadium, and Mickey Mantle wound up making quite an impression on the eight-year-old boy and the copper facade hanging from the right-field roof.
- 3 During that afternoon contest between the Yankees and Washington Senators, Crystal and thousands of others watched in awe as the blond Bronx Bomber launched a moon shot that barely missed becoming the first fair ball hit completely out of the stadium. Mantle's blast on a 2-2 fastball from Senators pitcher Pedro Ramos ricocheted off the decorative facade, just 18 inches from the top of the roof.
- 4 After the game, Ramos joked to reporters: "If it had not hit the roof, it would have landed in Brooklyn."
- 5 The Mick's loooooong home run capped an extraordinary day for young Billy—a day that would change his life forever.
- 6 His father was a concert promoter who managed the old Commodore Music Shop on 42nd Street in Manhattan. Legendary jazz artist Louis Armstrong had given the elder Crystal his box seats for a Yankees game that late May day, and the father had planned on taking Billy's older brother. But when his big brother hurt his back, the ticket went to Billy. His dad arranged for Yankees trainer Gus Mauch to take Billy down to the home-team clubhouse before the game.

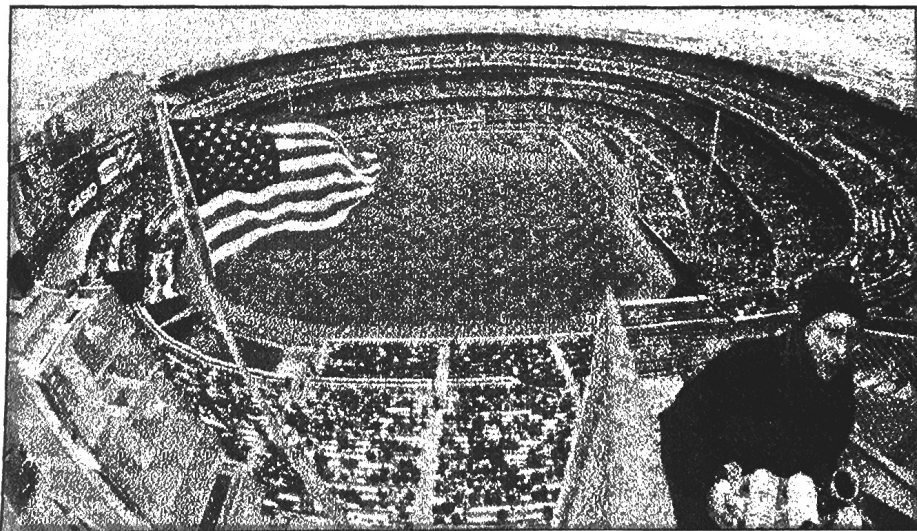


This photo diagram shows the path of the two home runs hit by Mickey Mantle on May 30, 1956, the day on which Billy Crystal attended his first New York Yankees baseball game at Yankee Stadium. The flight path of one home run (right) nearly carried the ball over the facade in right field and out of the stadium. Mantle played all of his 18 professional seasons with the Yankees, helping them win seven World Series from 1951 to 1968. He was also named the American League's Most Valuable Player three times.

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- 7 "You can imagine how exciting that was for a little kid," Crystal told the *New York Times* in a 1998 interview. "Gus came out and talked to us and then took my program inside and brought it out with all the signatures on it. [Yankees manager] Casey Stengel came out in the hall, and I remember saying, 'Who's pitching today, Casey?' and he looked at me and said, 'You are, kid, suit up.' How could you not be a Yankees fan after that?"
- 8 Mantle became his idol and the stadium the center of his young universe.
- 9 Crystal would make the 90-minute trek on the Long Island Railroad to the famed ballpark about 25 times a season after that memorable day. And he and the neighborhood kids in the New York suburb of Long Beach would play baseball in the summers from sunrise to sunset.
- 10 Crystal blossomed into an outstanding second baseman and earned a baseball scholarship to Marshall University in West Virginia. But his baseball-playing days ended when the school dropped the program his freshman year.
- 11 He wound up returning to the metropolitan area and eventually studied film and television at New York University, where one of his professors was Academy Award-winning director Martin Scorsese.

- 12 After working for several years as a stand-up comic, Crystal left Long Island for Hollywood in 1976 and, a year later, got his big break when he landed the role of the gay character Jodie Dallas on the ABC sitcom *Soap*. He later became a regular on *Saturday Night Live*, where his "you look mahvellous" impression of Fernando Lamas became a huge hit with viewers. His career peaked in the late 1980s and early '90s when his roles in blockbuster movies such as *When Harry Met Sally . . .* and *City Slickers* established him as a major star. His celebrity status only grew when he became a frequent host of the Academy Awards show.
- 13 Along the way, Crystal developed a friendship with Mantle, his childhood idol. The Mick said on several occasions if anyone ever did produce a movie about him, he'd want it to be Crystal. And in 2001, six years after the Hall of Fame baseball player died, Crystal debuted the film *61\**, which took a behind-the-scenes look at Mantle and Roger Maris's pursuit of Babe Ruth's home-run record during the historic 1961 season.
- 14 Nearly a half-century after his first trip there, Yankee Stadium remains one of the most special places in Crystal's world. Though he lives on the West Coast, he has returned often to the ballpark to watch games and take part in special ceremonies.
- 15 The stadium he first saw in 1956 underwent massive changes during the renovations of the mid-1970s, but it still remains a magical place.
- 16 "I still feel the same way I did when I was a little boy," he said. "The joy it gave me when I was playing with my friends, pretending to be a Yankee, or pretending with my brother that we were broadcasting the games.
- 17 "I just think of my father. Every time I'm [there], I think of my father. I think of the way he got us to love it without saying, 'Love this.'"



New Yankee Stadium on Opening Day, April 16, 2009

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