

Baseball in my life

Sport & Tourism, Baseball



Watching a baseball game with someone is not like watching a movie. Indeed, while the dark of the theater demands silence, the ambling pace of a baseball game invites conversation, and the hard plastic bleacher seats somehow seem softer and more intimate amidst a stadium full of people. But you have to know when to talk and when to be silent. You must understand the rhythm of the game and defer your own conversation to the crack of the bat and the roar of the crowd. In order to fully understand the narrative of a game as it unfolds inning by inning, you must not be put off by the monotony of one man throwing a ball and another man swinging a bat at it, over and over and over again. Baseball is emblematic of the connection I feel with Peter; we can sit in silence or pass three innings in deep conversation and not lose track of the game. We see the chess match develop between pitcher and hitter and the nuance to each pitch, each swing, and each play that makes baseball such a unique struggle between individuals. That Peter appreciates something so deeply important to me makes it easy to consider him a close friend. From the baseball we watch to the books we read, Peter and I share a temperament that unites us in appreciation of things larger than ourselves.

I rarely see Peter. He goes to school in Providence and I in Cambridge, but in many ways we are closer now than we ever were in high school when we saw each other every day. We talk on a daily basis about baseball, our respective love interests, and a shared displeasure with our own, startlingly similar, college experiences. More than anything else, what has brought and kept Peter and I so close is a shared disillusionment with the college experience. We each left our hometown brimming with excitement and hope,

ready to conquer college, only to find that kindred spirits were few and far between at our respective schools. Ours are the trials and tribulations of two kids who were raised quite similarly as they move through relatively similar northeast liberal arts college environments.

I know Peter's parents and siblings and he knows mine, and the expectations and values I have observed in his home remind me of those that exist in my own. Peter and I are who we are because of our families, and we remain very close with our parents and siblings. We come from modesty, value humility, and are grateful for the opportunities our families have provided and try to make the most of them. But we often find ourselves inundated with just the opposite approach to the college experience. We have similar reactions to the wealth and privilege on our campuses and consequently are put off by the feeling that our schools are little more than playgrounds for the rich and the well connected. The emotional bond Peter and I feel may be explained by similar means as the deep bond reported by soldiers (Parker, 2017). These individuals rely on one another to stay alive in the face of traumatic experience in no small part because only those by their side can truly conceive the reality of war. Peter and I don't dodge bullets, but we rely on one another to retain and affirm the values our parents emphasized amidst a college setting that promotes starkly different social goals. We have each stumbled into environments that challenge our core beliefs, but we know that the other person is fighting the same fight and is very much in our foxhole.

Interacting with those who are quite different from us at school has forced Peter and I to become more secure in our own self-concepts, to hold on tight to the lessons instilled by our respective upbringings. We are aware of our own vulnerabilities to the extent that we can talk about them with each other. We both know what we want, what we ought to want, and are generally stymied by the lack of intersection between the two. Perhaps it is because we have so many shared interests and experiences that we feel comfortable disclosing some of our more personal anxieties and dissatisfactions with aspects of our lives. Peter has sent me some texts that I likely wouldn't have sent him, but because he shared first, I felt comfortable matching his disclosure (Parker, 2017). It's much easier for me to say "Yeah, I get that, I feel you." than to share first, but his openness, albeit sometimes intoxicated, has made me feel more comfortable wading into weightier matters. I learned that Peter struggled with bouts of depression freshman year, so I was able to share that I had considered transferring. I would like to tell Peter that my parents are getting a divorce. I would like to tell him about the car crash I was in last fall. But I haven't. My hesitation does not stem from worry about how Peter will react, but from my own trepidation. These things are so personal, so distinctly my own, that I don't feel as though I'm ready to share them with Peter. Peter and I are great friends, and in time I'm sure I will share these things with him, but at this point in our relationship I am not ready to give him those parts of me.

Although Social Penetration Theory might indicate that Peter and I do not check all the boxes for a deep relationship because we seem to only selectively reveal more personal information (Parker, 2017), Peter and I have

a method of discussing more abstract or touchy subjects. Reading has, for the entirety of our relationship, been a means of connecting, and in recent years, the books we read and recommend to each other have taken on a greater importance. Perhaps the nature of our friendship is most apparent in the specific lines we read and then immediately send to one another. One of us will read a line that moves us in some way, and he will share it with the other. This is our own form of self-disclosure and I-sharing. In sending Peter a line, I convey that I believe that he will react to the words in a similar fashion as I have (Pinel et. Al, 2006). In this way, we are able to indirectly discuss concepts that bear a great deal of significance to us without having to convey the gravitas of personal experience in a text message. Additionally, because we have this shared corpus of literary knowledge, we can quote some of our favorite lines back to each other at appropriate moments and respond meaningfully to the other while strengthening our relationship because we have done so in a manner that bears personal significance. There is a great deal of comfort in sharing a phrase that makes you feel emotion with another person who will understand the words in a similar fashion.

As two high-performing students from a large public school that at times seemed more like a factory for shiny new SAT and ACT scores, Peter and I managed to stay close even as we ran the gauntlet of college admissions. My process was made significantly easier by my early commitment to Harvard to play baseball, but I never detected any resentment or jealousy from Peter. He didn't view my success as a hindrance to his own. To his credit, Peter was more secure with his self-concept than I was with mine at that time. He knew

that he did not want to play college sports and had a fairly good idea of what he wanted to study and what he wanted to do with his degree. Peter respected my baseball prowess, and I respected his efforts on the soccer field, basketball court, and later, the track, but mine was a path that he did not covet and thus we never felt like direct competitors, jockeying for a spot in some college's class of 2018. We were both fairly good at what we did, and that was good enough for us.

Baseball is played in short bursts, tightly packed with motion and improvisation, interspersed within long bouts of waiting, of standing around kicking at the dirt, of adjusting a cap or rubbing the baseball. So too is my relationship with Peter. We are always in touch, but only seldom does our ambling conversation deepen to explore more expressly personal topics. We access and solidify our mutual understanding of those topics through the way we were raised and the books we read. And as often as we can, we go to baseball games. Peter and I have the same opinions about the way the world should work and the way the people in it should act. We share an appreciation for baseball because we anticipate, see, and react to the same things, and we share a strong relationship because we see the curveballs life throws at us the same way.