

Dream Job

Baseball helps a daughter reconnect with her dad, and a retiree find his true calling.

For most Mariners fans, standing by your team has been a trail of dashed expectations, as the M's have fallen from one of the winningest records in modern baseball to being cellar dwellers in a bad division. But however they fare on the field, nearly every home game reminds me that life is full of second chances and dreams come true. That's because I get to watch Harold Jaffe, aka my dad, at work—in the career he waited all his life for.

Dad hit retirement age three years ago, and while he and my stepmother continued to run their consumer electronics business, he cut way back on his hours. But then, at a Mariners game, he ran into an old high school buddy named Billy who was working as a seating host. Dad promptly applied to be a host in the Diamond Club, the exclusive 300-seat section behind home plate, for the grand sum of \$9.50 an hour. He showed his talent for schmoozing and was soon promoted to weekend concierge captain.

This year he rose again, to daily concierge captain, for around \$13 an hour plus a discount on Mariners gear and four free tickets a month on the decidedly nonexclusive 300 level. He's obviously not in it for the money. But if God were to create a Harold Jaffe and a Harold Jaffe—perfect job, this is what God would have made.

Baseball was always important in Dad's life. In 1955 and '56, he played center field for Garfield High, even though he peaked at five feet, four inches tall. Afterward, as a young bank employee with two small children, he coached Little League in Tacoma. Then, when we lived in Northern California, I was bat girl for a succession of teams that Dad coached and my brother played on. Dad took us to games—the Tacoma and San Francisco Giants, the Oakland A's, the

San Jose Bees. Mom wasn't a fan; baseball was something he shared with my brother and me alone.

Then my parents divorced, and Dad remarried and moved away. It was hard to sustain a connection; what can a father say to his moody teenage daughter? Then I went off to college and moved abroad. But when I returned to the States in 1993, it was to Ballard, just 50 miles from where he lived in Gig Harbor. And we reclaimed our relationship through baseball.

Together, we bemoaned the Mariners' awful collective performance and admired individuals' amazing play. In 1995, when the M's nearly reached the World Series, we sneered at new fans who'd only jumped on the bandwagon after the team got good. I called Dad during games to complain about botched calls, bad trades, and good fielders who couldn't get on base. We argued furiously over Mike Cameron, who played Dad's old position. Occasionally we'd attend a game; I was there when he bumped into Billy and discovered his destiny.

Somehow, in a working life spent selling home theater and audio systems, Dad acquired just the air of authority and warmth a place like the Diamond Club requires. He has made friends out of regulars like Mike and Kathy Holmgren—Mr. and Mrs. Seahawk—and out of folks who are not regulars, like the guy who flies in from Japan a few times a year to see a game and eat sushi afterward with Dad. When I took my son and a couple of friends on a pre-game visit to the Diamond Club, a host stopped us at the door. "I'm Harold Jaffe's daughter," I explained. "He said he'd give us a tour."

"Why didn't you say so?" she replied. "Hey! This is Harold's daughter!" And we were whisked into a rarefied atmosphere of open bars and all-you-can-eat delicacies. Sharon Hargrove, the wife of Mariners' manager Mike, walked by and gave Dad a hug. Dave Valle, the M's catcher-

IT WAS HARD TO STAY CONNECTED. WHAT CAN A FATHER SAY TO HIS MOODY TEENAGE DAUGHTER?



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turned-commentator, stopped on his way to the broadcast booth, shook Dad’s hand, and signed balls for my son and his friend. Or rather for *me* and my son’s friend.

Once my stepmom took me to the club for a game to see Dad in action. He was in his element, watching out for fans who needed attention and others who broke the rules or tried to sneak their friends in. One regular, retired state senator Sid Snyder, had taken a suite to celebrate his 80th birthday with his wife, Bette. The Diamond Club wanted to acknowledge the event, so my dad went up to the suite to present a small gift from the staff. He was about to leave when Sid asked him to

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come say hi to Bette. “I didn’t want to disturb her,” he recalled afterward. “But she waved me down and said, ‘I want you to meet my friend Christine Gregoire.’” Dad chatted with the governor about baseball and their mutual friend Sid, then returned to his post.

When Dad’s not working, we still call during games, particularly when I miss an inning for dinner or there’s a walk-off home run. When he’s out of town, I update him, sometimes several times in an hour; he couldn’t believe it when I told him Jamie Moyer had been traded. I only wish he could put me in touch with the umpires, so I could correct their errors. And with general manager Bill Bavasi—hasn’t he read *Moneyball*?

The sad part is that Dad doesn’t get to spend as much time outside with the general public—and us—as he used to, although he tries to get out as much as he can. But I think I have more fun watching him—even through binoculars, from the cheap seats—than talking to him about the games. We pick him out by his trousers: He has an unmistakable way of standing, his hands at his sides, half-snapping his fingers. “Look, Seth,” I tell my son, “it’s Papa’s pants!”

When we play the Oakland A’s, I call my brother, who now lives in the Bay Area: “Did you see Dad’s pants?” I want him to come up and visit the Diamond Club too; it would be worth the \$125 per ticket. He could see our dad in his element, and see how it’s never too late to find your calling. ✨