

I Lied to Yogi, and that is the Simple Truth

By Bob Dahn, NSPS Past President

When Yogi passed, my friend Alonzo posted some photos of, and quips about, Yogi. I had been thinking about Yogi, and I shared this story with him. My wife suggested I share it with everyone, or at least the “everyone” that I know.

The first baseball number I wore was 8. I played one form or another of organized ball into my sixties. I did not always wear 8, but when I finally finished playing ball 2 or 3 years ago I was wearing 8. Clearly 8 is the perfect number, whenever Yogi slid or dove for a ball it was infinity.

I don't remember a great deal prior to 1960, for that matter I don't remember a great deal after 1960. I do remember a day in 1957 or 1958. Baseball was my first love, a love that has endured. My dad would bring us to a game or two a year. Sitting in the upper decks, or by the foul poles, it did not matter. Being at the Yankee Stadium was a gift. Writing this is like seeing that perfect field for the first time all over again.

This particular day, my dad had gotten front row tickets directly behind home plate. Even though it meant we would have no chance to catch a ball, I was thrilled to be sitting so close to Yogi. At some point early in the game a pitch was fouled directly toward our seats. It slammed into the base of the wall, squeezed underneath and appeared at my feet. I picked it up quickly and put it in my glove. Convinced I would be forced to give it back, I tried to act like I hadn't seen a thing.

The ball boy came over to retrieve the ball and after looking around without success went to the umpire to tell him that the ball was missing. The umpire and Yogi turned around and came over to have a look for themselves. Having no more luck than the ball boy, they looked at each other, puzzled. Then Yogi turned, looked at me and said "Hey kid did you see where that ball went?" Probably red with guilt I looked down and mumbled something like, “no sir”. I had lied to Yogi Berra, and that is the simple truth.

The ball was kept in an honored location for several years, until one day the desire to catch, throw, and hit the “Yogi Ball” was overwhelming. I grabbed the ball and rushed off to use it in a pick up game. Without uttering a word to anyone about the ball, we began the game. Sure enough it got hit into the woods, probably by some kid wearing 7, never to be seen again. At the time, it seemed like the most foolish thing I could have done. Today, thinking about Yogi, the ball, and that day so long ago, maybe it should be the fate of every ball to be lost in the woods, or the hands of some awestruck kid sitting in the cheap seats.

Yogi was a blessing both on and off the field. Reflecting on this special day, with my wonderful father, the stadium and the ball, I can imagine Yogi might have said, “the ball may have been lost, but it made real good time getting there”.