

FAMILY THEMIE PARK

The home of the Red Sox takes up a relatively small area for a major league ballpark, but it holds an immeasurable place in the hearts of New Englanders

BY BOB HOHLER | GLOBE STAFF

A first kiss. A last breath. Soaring spirits and scattered ashes. Humanity at its best and worst in an emerald memorial to us, the sons and daughters of a baseball century. We are Fenway Park. For 100 years, a brick-faced meeting place near the banks of the Muddy River has bound us together in happiness and heartache through the seasons of our lives. We have shared the sensations. Our first breathtaking glimpse of Fenway in paradise green. The ache of scrunching into quirky nooks of the antique park, craning to track the game's greatest hits. The echoes of tens of thousands of voices joined as one. We remember the names, from Smoky Joe in 1912 to Salty 100 springs later. We see the faces: Honey Fitz, FDR, Tony C, Bobby V. Through it all — world wars and World Series, the Steel Age and steroids, eephus pitches and pink hats — Fenway has stood for us. We were born to it, we have led our children to it, and in the winter of our lives we have leaned on it like an old friend. It's our graceland. A hundred years. A million stories. One family. We are Fenway Park.

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On a summer afternoon in 2001, Sarah Dembinski and Bobby Phillips leaned close in the Fenway bleachers and shared their first kiss. They were married in 2004, and when their first child arrived almost nine months to the night after the Red Sox won their first World Series in 86 years, they named her Camryn Fenway Phillips.

The next summer, Denise Quickenton, as true a Fenway fan as any, was seven months pregnant and sitting sun-baked in the bleachers when her husband, Todd, suggested they go below to escape the 90-degree heat. As they settled at a shaded picnic table, Denise said gratefully, "I love you so much."

Then she was gone. In cardiac arrest, Denise was rushed to the hospital, where doctors saved her baby as she lay dying. Denise was 29.

This summer, 5-year-old Maxwell Quickenton will crest a Fenway ramp and capture his first glimpse of a place his mother loved.

"I want to bring it full circle," Todd said. "I want Maxwell to feel the magic his mother and I felt at Fenway."

Steve Potoczak knows that magic. His father introduced him to it, a gift Potoczak and millions of other parents have given their children.

As a teenager in the 1970s, Potoczak embraced

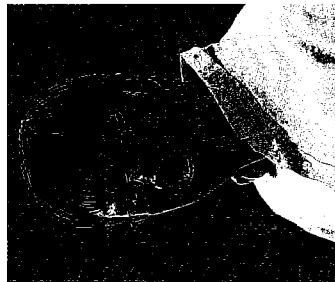
a rite of passage for many young Sox fans. He and his pals defied the police and personal danger by scaling the giant liquor billboard beyond the Green Monster to watch the Sox play for free. Before they climbed, many of the teens collected souvenirs by scrambling for balls that cleared the Wall in batting practice.

One of those boys was Kevin Holmes. He was 15 when he chased a ball onto the railroad tracks along the Massachusetts Turnpike in 1979 and was struck by a train. Kevin's family buried him with his Sox cap, and while his loved ones huddled graveside, the Rev. Ned C. Watts Jr. said, "I sense right now that Kevin's spirit is not with us here but over Fenway Park, where his beloved Red Sox are playing."

The Sox, as if to honor Kevin, defeated the Blue Jays that afternoon when Bob Watson led off the bottom of the 11th with a home run deep over the Wall. The ball bounced toward the tracks, where a barrier had been erected to prevent another child of Fenway from dying for his love of the game.

Watson's teammates that day included Jim Rice, who three years later committed an act of humanity at its best. On an August afternoon in 1982, 4-year-old Jonathan Keane was seated near the Sox dugout when a line drive slammed into his head. Panic ensued, many witnesses recoiling

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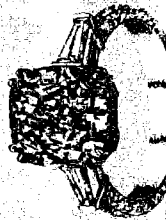


Above: Jim Rice carries Jonathan Keane to safety after a ball struck the 4-year-old in the head. Left: Keane today.

1982 FILE (ABOVE); SARA D. DAVIS FOR THE GLOBE (LEFT)

Some of our gems are 100 years old ...
But *none* are as precious as you Fenway

wishing you 100 & 100 & 100 & 100 more!



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at the sight of blood gushing from the boy's fractured skull.

Not Rice. He sprang from the dugout, cradled the child in his arms, and hustled him to urgent care, where doctors credited Rice's rapid response with sparing the boy from brain damage.

Thirty years later, Jonathan Keane lives in Durham, N.C. He is a new father, longing for the day he can introduce his son to the Hall of Famer who saved him and the park he considers a monument to human kindness.

"Rice's heroism that day says the world about him," Keane said. "I'm lucky to have survived, and I'm really looking forward to getting back to Fenway Park, one of the most special places on the planet for me."

Rice's path to the Fens was blazed a generation earlier by Pumpsie Green. In an act of humanity at its worst, Fenway owner Tom Yawkey long refused to allow African-Americans, including greats Willie Mays and Jackie Robinson, to play for the Sox. Yawkey main-

OPENING DAYS WERE FAMILY HOLIDAYS. SCHOOL LUNCHESES WERE OUT, PEANUTS AND CRACKER JACK IN.

tained his racist policy more than a decade after Robinson broke baseball's color barrier with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. Even after every other major league team integrated and Green led the Sox in batting in spring training in 1959, Yawkey refused to budge.

Not until after Yawkey's racist manager, Pinky Higgins, was fired in midseason did Green make his Fenway debut on Aug. 4, 1959, ending an era of shame. Collateral damage continued, though, as many African-American fans felt unwelcome at Fenway for years to come.

Green, by breaking the Sox color line and enduring racist indignities across the country, cleared the way for scores of minority players, including members of the richly diverse team that ended the franchise's championship drought in 2004.

In a phone interview from his home in El Cerrito, Calif., the 78-year-old Green recalled proudly celebrating the 2004 triumph.

"After everything I went through," he said, "I was the happiest guy on the West Coast that night."

Fenway's greatest hitter, Ted Williams, eased Green's transition to the majors by playing catch with him before games. In 1962, Green's Sox career quietly ended, but not be-

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fore he witnessed The Kid's final Fenway at-bat (a home run into the Sox bullpen in 1960) and Carl Yastrzemski's Fenway debut (a single to left in 1961).

Ted and Yaz and Pumpsie are Fenway Park.

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So is Sister Anne D'Arcy. A Brighton girl, Sister D'Arcy entered the religious life at 18 in 1952. She stuck with the Sox through the early '60s when, plainly speaking, they stunk, sometimes drawing fewer than 3,000 paying customers. No need for scalpers. Or Ace Tickets.

Those were the years when Richard Cardinal Cushing, a Sox fan from Southie, brought joy to convents throughout the archdiocese by hosting an annual Nuns Day in the Fens. Sisters flocked to the wooden-slatted grandstands, happily speckling their full-length habits with mustard and melted ice cream.

It was a simpler time, Sister D'Arcy recalled, when ordinary folks could afford to visit Fenway and share the communal spirit, for better or worse.

"Baseball is like life, isn't it?" said Sister D'Arcy, still active at 77 with the Sisters of St. Joseph, a congregation of Fenway faithful. "There are a lot of ups and downs."

The Sox went straight up in 1967, the Impossible Dream season, when Fenway changed for-

ever. Yaz, Tony C, Boomer, and the boys became the toast of the town, ending the days of empty grandstands and leaving less room for the sisters.

By the time New England's children of the '60s reached school age, Opening Days were family holidays. School lunches were out, peanuts and Cracker Jack in. Baseball beat biology, and many of those kids kept returning to Fenway, in Jeff Idelson's case every chance he got.

At 16, Idelson was a vendor ("Get your popcorn heah!"). At 21, he was working the press box as a public relations intern. A year later, he was producing radio broadcasts for Ken Coleman and Joe Castiglione.

Now Idelson is president of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, N.Y., where he is readying a yearlong exhibit celebrating the 100th birthday of a park that to him feels like home.

"Fenway is part of the landscape that defines me as a person," Idelson said from Cooperstown. "My memories are beautiful, exciting, and everlasting."

Which is how Ellen Connor remembers Fenway — and Tony Conigliaro. No one made the park more of a girl magnet in the 1960s than Tony C, the local heartthrob. When Connor wasn't spending her free time at Fenway, she of-

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ten was staking out Conigliaro's apartment building in Brookline. She was no more than 16 when he graced her autograph book with a personal note: "To Ellen, if they trade me, you're coming with me."

"Of course I wanted to marry him, like a million other teenage girls," Connor recalled.

Conigliaro eventually moved on without her, and Connor took her trove of Tony C memorabilia to Virginia, where she is raising a 5-year-old terrier. His name is Fenway.

Ellen Connor is Fenway Park.

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By the 1970s, Boston's college kids had turned Fenway into party central, the air above the bleachers often thick with marijuana smoke. Among the visiting collegians who caught Fenway fever were Tom Werner, a Harvard student from New York, and Andy Harp, a Californian who studied at the Berklee College of Music. They became part of America's Fenway diaspora.

While Werner went on to make a Hollywood fortune — he later joined John W. Henry and Larry Lucchino in buying the Sox and investing millions to extend Fenway's life — Harp stayed a while to play trumpet with Swallow ("the best band to come out of Boston since J. Geils," the *Globe* gushed) and feed his Fenway habit.

"I was hooked on that wonderful old pile of a park," Harp said.

The moment the Sox won the American League pennant in 1975, Harp grabbed a sleeping bag and raced to Lansdowne Street, where he started the line for World Series tickets. The line quickly swelled, Harp sharing the sidewalk with 4,000 diehards who camped for more than 30 hours in the October chill for a shot at the best tickets available: standing room.

Harp scored tickets to Games 1, 6, and 7, and remembers the thrill of watching Luis Tiant dismantle Cincinnati's Big Red Machine, 6-0, in Game 1. Then calamity struck: Harp's band was called to play a honeymoon resort in the Poconos. He missed Game 6, one of the greatest in baseball history, and by the time the Sox lost Game 7, which he also missed, Harp was a study in Fenway heartache.

"One of the most disappointing experiences of my life," he said from San Luis Obispo, Calif., where he hosts a classical music show on public radio.

Disappointing? Sure.

But nothing like the pain of 1978, 1986, and 2003. Crushing pain. The kind that led some fans to wonder whether Fenway and the Sox were indeed cursed. Their anguish contributed to a sports talk radio culture that former Celtics coach Rick Pitino branded "the fellowship of the miserable."

Most of the personalities — the broadcast hosts and callers — were born to Fenway. Among them was "Danny from Quincy," Danny DiPaolo, a li-



2007 FILE/GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/JIM DAVIS

A throng waits to get into an American League Championship Series game against the Indians.

censed maritime captain and one of the most spirited and savvy Sox callers on Boston's airwaves. Thanks to an usher from Quincy who let him in for free, DiPaolo visited Fenway hundreds of times as a kid. He has attended hundreds of games since.

DiPaolo epitomizes countless fans who spend part of every day thinking, talking, or arguing about the Sox. Don't call him miserable, though. He rants because he cares.

"Arguments and passion come out of love," DiPaolo said, "even if it's tough love."

At Fenway, love comes in shades. Pink is generally favored by newcomers who joined the crowds after the Sox made history in 2004. Lifelong fans, Joanna MacDonald among them, represent old-school red, white, and blue.

As a teen from Southie, MacDonald often skipped school for games, once eliciting a laugh from Derek Jeter, a Skippy peanut butter spokesman, by screaming, "Hey, Jeter, Skippy sucks." In her 20s, MacDonald hosted a raucous bachelorette party in the bleachers. And when she was 33, she went into early labor just as she cheered Jonathan Papelbon striking out Colorado's Seth Smith to clinch the 2007 World Series.

Reaching the Longwood medical area proved perilous for MacDonald and her husband, Richard Clancy. Revelers had commandeered the streets around Fenway, forcing Clancy to swerve their car over sidewalks en route to the delivery room.

MacDonald and Clancy were so frazzled by the time their son was born prematurely that they were stumped for a name.

Then it came to them. Following the lead of parents who named babies for stars of the 2004 Sox, their thoughts turned to Boston's Riverdancing, Series-clinching closer?

Jonathan Clancy is Fenway Park.

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The Jimmy Fund also is Fenway Park. So are the Yawkey Foundation and the Red Sox Foundation.

Theo and Tito are Fenway Park, as are all-time greats from Tris Speaker to Pedro Martinez.

Johnny Pesky, a fixture for 70 years, is Fenway Park. So are Ned Martin, Sherm Feller, and the organists, from John Kiley to Josh Kantor.

The Citgo sign? That's Fenway Park. "Dirty Water" and "Sweet Caroline," too.

Ray Charles, James Taylor, Sinatra, Jagger, McCartney, Springsteen, and Buffett: they're Fenway Park. So are the 1963 Boston Patriots and the 2011 Boston Bruins.

Tragically, Torie Snelgrove, a Sox fan and Emerson College student who died at 21 in a 2004 celebration gone bad, is Fenway Park.

Shamefully, so is Donald J. Fitzpatrick, the Sox's sexually criminal late clubhouse manager.

Christopher Casella also is Fenway Park. An Athol police sergeant, Casella was among thousands of New Englanders inspired by the 2004 milestone to honor loved ones who died before their dreams of seeing the Sox win it all were fulfilled. On Opening Day in 2005, 38 years after Casella's father, John, first took him to the Fens, he sprinkled his father's ashes from the bleachers onto the field they loved.

John Casella was home — with us.

We are Fenway Park. ♦