



BASEBALL AND TAY-SACHS

By Tim Lord

One of the things a parent looks forward to most when a son or daughter is born is sharing passions and joys with those children to be. I love baseball, fly fishing, biking, hiking, camping, all things that are fun to do with children and as a family. When my son Hayden was born, his first Mets baseball game became a much anticipated activity. Friends of ours laid bets as to how old he needed to be before I dragged him to the ballpark.

Four months old didn't seem too young for a few innings of ball. It wasn't the Mets...it was the dreaded Yankees, but at least he'd see a game. We lasted three innings. He startled a lot when the scoreboard operator cranked up the incessant music between innings, or when the crowd cheered. He had Tay-Sachs disease, although we did not know it for 12 more months, and enjoying things like baseball games would be very different than what I had expected when Hayden was born.

As Hayden got sicker and sicker, and as his physical and mental handicaps became more manifest, one of the periodic stabs of the disease's reality

was all the things we couldn't do. We could not fly fish, we could not throw a ball, we could not bike with him in the seat on the back, we could not go to ball games. With the help of wonderful counsellors and friends, however, we began to find things we could do, things that would bring Hayden joy and would give our family memories: a warm water pool across town for swims, walking in dry leaves so he could hear the crinkle, a carousel, and a trip to Florida. (Okay, it was January, it was cold...but our incredible friend Dick Kennedy cranked up his pool to 98 degrees so that Mr. Gurgles, as he called Hayden, could float in it for hours, and finally fall asleep in his Mom's arms as we floated, his limbs as free and unencumbered as they ever had been or would be.) These were the things we could do together.

And what about baseball? We didn't give up on baseball. We found a different way to do baseball. Hayden taught me to enjoy it in a whole new way. He would lie in my lap as we watched the Mets on TV, eyes wide open, excited because I was excited and a little surprised, too, that I was

keeping him up way past his bedtime. His mom likes a strict bedtime, so when 10:00 or 10:30 PM would come around, he'd look up at me like, "Wow, we're really pushing it tonight, huh!" He'd look up at me and I'd do the play-by-play. All through the playoffs and World Series of the fall of 2000, I'd murmur to him, "Piazza's up...two men on...strike on the outside corner...the Mets need some runs...Let's Go Mets!...It's a long fly ball....way back...way back...It's out of here!"

Hayden didn't have much choice about what he liked to do, because of Tay-Sachs. So I had to learn from him. I learned things from him that will be very important to his healthy, funny almost two year old sister Annie. He taught me to listen carefully and share those things that he loved, like shadows in the trees, and baseball on TV. Hayden loved to listen to the sound of my play-by-play. I listen to games in a different way now. I try to listen to Annie in a different way now, grateful that I got to share my passions, and his passions, with my son Hayden in unexpected ways. I am looking forward to finding out what Annie likes to do...and hoping she likes baseball and my play-by-play.