

An old man travels in time back seventy-five years to improve the fortunes of his favorite baseball team – the Cleveland Indians. The story is lodged in the author's real life experiences, and is therefore is a memoir as well as fiction.

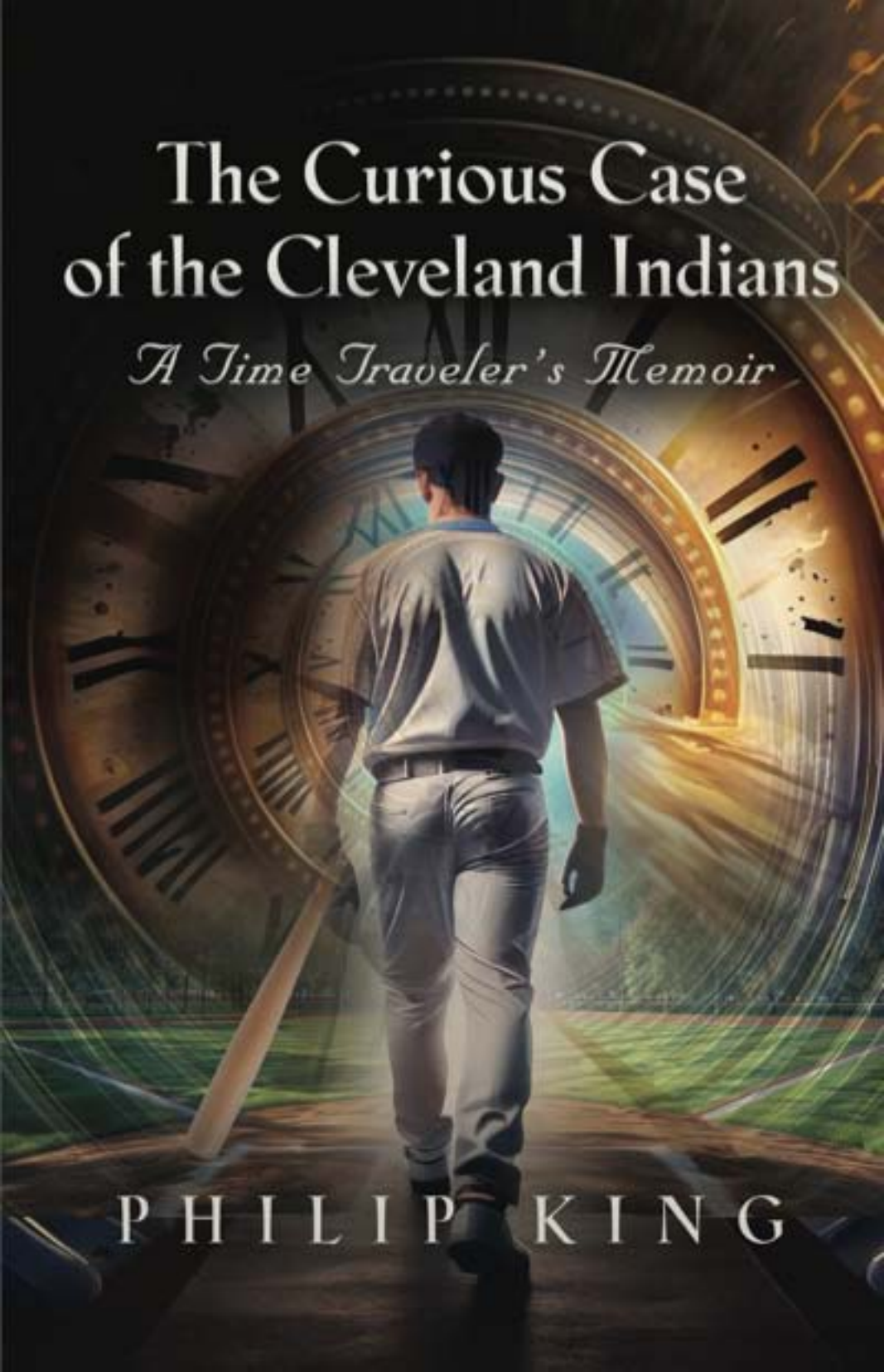
The Curious Case of the Cleveland Indians

A Time Traveler's Memoir

by Philip King

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The Curious Case of the Cleveland Indians

A Time Traveler's Memoir

PHILIP KING

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This book is substantially a work of fiction. References to historical events, real people, or real places are used fictitiously. The book includes public figures, who are named, and composite characters based on real persons, who are not named. The memoir segments are truthful recollections of actual events in the author's life. They reflect the author's present memories of experiences over time. Names of persons depicted have been withheld and personal characteristics altered.

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Preface

The Old Man dreams: *He is with his high school friend, D., a track miler and basketball player. They're both young. He tells D. that he's writing a book. It's on baseball. He shows him a collection of his baseball dreams, and says they're going into the book. The Dreamer notes that he typed all the dreams in red ink, indicating their importance. D. is interested but appears skeptical.*

Much of this book is about major league baseball - one team in particular, and its players. How good they were or weren't; how much they contributed to their team winning games, and whether different players, had they been kept, or acquired, would have done better. An intertwined theme is the story of the life and times of a mid-twentieth century boy discovering baseball, playing it, dreaming, growing into a man, then growing old, rooting for the team through thick and thin. The third theme is a saga of traveling in time to improve the team's fortunes and the lives of persons loved and admired. A fourth piece is dreams - all save one dreamt by the character based on the author. All of this in the context of part five - the background of planetary ecological decline and the beginnings of civilizational unraveling. These parts and themes are connected as the chronology unfolds and doubles back on itself.

This tale of baseball, of growing up in mid-twentieth century America and of moving backwards through time, has a main character, whom we'll call the Protagonist, and depending on his age and activities in each scene, the Boy, the Teenager, the Young Man, the Man, the Professor, the Old Man, the Time Traveler, whatever fits - these identities will be capitalized to distinguish him from other characters. Other participants will not have names, except for known baseball people and other public figures. Some characters will be identified by an initial. Readers of the author's acquaintance may recognize aspects of one another. There will be several dogs with names.

Some characters portrayed here are based on real people. Some of the events portrayed actually happened, with the possible exception of those related to time travel - although these also are experienced by

the characters as real. Any errors of fact are due entirely to fallible memory.

The interspersed dreams were really dreamt and are not fictional creations. Dreams belong here because they variously revisit, merge, meld, reshape and extend events in time. They play with time, resurrecting long ago and forgotten events and persons into vivid presence. Dreams unearth themes and concerns forgotten or suppressed in wakefulness. They relate and reveal the life beneath and beyond waking life. Dreaming is a time machine of sorts, and baseball dreams are very much in the mix of a baseball time travel story.

This book is written primarily for the author's satisfaction and not with a mind toward particular audiences. However, readers who are baseball fans - especially Cleveland fans, who are intrigued by time travel, who are older, who are from Ohio or elsewhere in the Midwest, who think certain things were better in bygone days, who have connected to life through sports, who care about the health of the planet, who wonder whether their own life arcs tell a coherent story - all may find value in these pages.

The more familiar readers are with the rhythms and cadences of baseball and the history and statistics of Major League Baseball (MLB), the better the reading. Baseball is a game suffused with numbers, and there will be plenty of them in this tale, as the author is a numbers guy. But feel free to skim the baseball analyses as you wish. Ultimately this is a story about people, with numbers dancing in the background.

The baseball analyses focus primarily on two statistics: Wins Above Average, WAA for short, is the most important. WAA is a summary measure, enumerating how many extra wins a player contributes to the team's yearly total above the contribution of an average player. WAA encompasses all the elements that increase wins: batting, base running, fielding and pitching. If the player is better than average, his WAA will be positive; if worse than average, negative.

A team with a cumulative players' WAA of 20 during any of the 1949-1960 seasons would be expected to have won $77 + 20 = 97$ games, and lose $77 - 20 = 57$. That record of 97-57 would have won the American League pennant in seven of those dozen years.

The second statistic, of considerable importance (but lesser than WAA) is OPS, the sum of a batter's on-base percentage and slugging percentage. OPS is the best single indicator of a player's offensive performance - both getting on base and hitting for power, i.e. extra base hits, and ultimately producing runs, and wins.

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A core question of this story is whether the Cleveland Indians could (could have, could still?) win more games back in mid-twentieth century. We shall see.

Introduction

The Middle-aged Man dreams: *I'm in a house – my Mom is there and another woman – unknown to me. There is a big closet / storeroom. I'm hunting through it. All the papers are there from my Ph.D. work, course notes from teaching, notes about society, etc. I look through some of them and they are really good. I think to myself that there's a book or two here, and that if I don't write them, it would be too bad, and a loss for the world. Then I find a photo and an article of me swinging a bat in a Giants uniform – great swing, excellent form. It's from 1992 – the only time I played in the major leagues. I'm so happy and excited to find it. I feel thrilled, wonderful and sad too because it was only that one time. I show it with pride to my mother. Then I call out to the other woman there to show her. She peers at it and says "what's this, Babe Ruth?" I say "are you totally clueless – this is me playing baseball in the major leagues! It was the most important moment in my life." I feel somewhat exasperated that she is so unforthcoming, but my main feeling is the thrill-satisfaction-sadness at the picture of my "moment of glory" – so great, and so brief.*

The plane tilts in its early morning descent into Chicago's O'Hare airport. Street lights are still ablaze as the eastern sky begins to lighten and glow. Out the window the passenger views a swath of the city, a few dozen square blocks. Scattered here and there are baseball and softball fields, several visible at any glance. From the ground these fields would not seem connected. They're in different neighborhoods, and players on one ball field would be unaware of games on other fields a short distance away. But from the air it all looks like a grand plan. The purpose, the design of the city must be to provide and sustain these fenced green oases with the white lined borders and dirt cutouts. No one on them now at 6:30 a.m. An archeologist from another planet would take note: perhaps they are the grounds for religious rituals, central to this civilization's patterns and meanings.

Fly into any American city or drive through any town and one will see similar parks and baseball fields interspersed throughout the landscape. They remain today even as the game has been eclipsed in popularity by other sports, and where the spontaneous play of bygone generations of kids has given way to organized leagues run by adults.

Chapter One: Veeck and Greenberg

It was Thursday, October 28, 1948. The Elderly Man from the future had recently appeared in Cleveland and settled in at the Colonial Hotel on Prospect Avenue. He was traveling under a pseudonym, as his real name was that of a five-year-old boy living down State. On a hotel typewriter the Man typed out a sheet of numbers he has memorized. He left the hotel and walked down to the shores of Lake Erie, to the stadium where the baseball club played. The afternoon sun glinted off the lake and a gentle breeze stirred the air. Two figures approached - the men he has come to see. The young baseball team owner and president and his companion headed for the gates of Municipal Stadium, toward the team offices. The smaller man walked with a limp from a wartime injury. They had a jaunty and satisfied air about them - as well they might, as only a few days earlier the Indians had won the World Series, polishing off the Boston Braves, four games to two. It was only the team's second World Series triumph in American League history, now stretching almost a half-century. One could anticipate more titles on the horizon for the up-and-coming Indians.

The team president is Bill Veeck. The current Farm Director and future General Manager is Hank Greenberg. They are both important in baseball lore. Veeck owned or co-owned major league franchises four times, bouncing from city to city, along the way becoming a thorn in the side of the baseball establishment with his advocacy of racial integration on the diamond, wacky promotions, and later with revelatory books exposing behind the scenes machinations of major league executives. He had purchased the Cleveland club in 1946. Now he was riding high.

Veeck's father, William Veeck Sr., was a Chicago sports journalist who wrote numerous columns about how he would run the Cubs differently, and the team's owner took him up on the implied offer and made him team president. So Veeck Junior as a teenager was exposed to the game on and off the field. As a young man in 1937 he came up with the idea of planting ivy on the outfield walls at Wrigley Field.

In 1940, Veeck left Chicago and purchased the American Association Triple-A Milwaukee Brewers. While a co-owner of the Brewers, Veeck served in the United States Marine Corps during

World War II. During this time a recoiling artillery piece crushed his right leg, requiring amputation first of the foot, and shortly after of the leg above the knee. Over his life he had 36 operations on the leg. After the team won three pennants in five years Veeck sold his Milwaukee franchise in 1945 for a \$275,000 profit.

In the fall of 1942 Veeck had met with Gerry Nugent, president of the Philadelphia Phillies. Veeck later wrote in his memoirs that he intended to buy the team and stock its roster with stars from the Negro leagues. (This is a matter of some controversy as there is only his word for the intention.) Veeck quickly secured financing, and agreed in principle to buy the team from Nugent. While on his way to close on the purchase, Veeck decided to alert MLB Commissioner Landis of his plan.

Although Veeck knew Landis was an ardent segregationist, he did not believe Landis would dare say Black players were unwelcome while they were fighting for the country in World War II. However, when Veeck arrived in Philadelphia, he was surprised to discover that the National League had taken over the Phillies and was seeking a new owner. Veeck's goal of owning a major league team was thwarted for the time being.

Veeck became the owner of the Indians in 1946. He immediately put all the team's games on radio, and also scheduled all the home games at Municipal Stadium for 1947. The team had been playing week day games in small and dilapidated League Park.

Our Protagonist would encounter (had encountered) Veeck another time, in 1957, in a behind-the-outfield-fence fans event at Municipal Stadium. Veeck had moved on for a while to the St. Louis Browns, before that club pulled up stakes for Baltimore. He was angling to purchase the Chicago White Sox, which he accomplished the following year. The Protagonist would be (was) fourteen in 1957, a smart if indifferent student, good infielder and pitcher on his high school and summer league teams. But that was later - earlier; and this was now - later, but earlier. (Language concerning verb tense has difficulties when dealing with time travel!)

As for Veeck's companion, Hank Greenberg: He had been a prodigious slugger for Detroit in the 1930s and 40s, one of the great American League first basemen (with Lou Gehrig and Jimmie Foxx) of the 30s. He had lost almost five years of his playing career to army service before and during World War Two, returning in the 1945 season to hit dramatic pennant-winning homers for the Tigers. His military service was the longest of all major league players. In 1946 he

led the league in home runs for the fourth time. After a final year, playing with Pittsburgh, Greenberg retired and was hired by Veeck. Developing and evaluating talent was his job.

Greenberg was the American League's most valuable player in both 1935 and 1940. His 183 runs batted in in 1937 is still the most ever by a right-handed batter (and in a 154-game season, at that). As the first Jewish baseball superstar he had been the target of antisemitism and was sympathetic to religious and racial minorities in organized baseball. In his year with Pittsburgh in 1947 he was one of the few players publicly to welcome Jackie Robinson to the major leagues. During his tenure as general manager he would sponsor more African-American players than any other major league executive.

In 1959 (in the original time stream, that is) Greenberg and Veeck were reunited in Chicago, as Vice-President / General Manager and President, respectively. The White Sox won the pennant that year, with the Indians coming in second, as was their wont.

The Elderly Man thought of how this impending conversation could change the Cleveland ball club and the lives of those affected by the team - players, fans and others. It could potentially erase from history his meeting Veeck nine years later, however clearly recollected by him in this moment. He would regret that if it happened (if he even remembered the erased and replaced reality). The Teenager he was then had met Herb Score at that same gathering. And Joe Altobelli, at the time an Indians' scrub infielder, later to be a major league manager for many years.

As he strode towards the two men, the Protagonist reminded himself that these guys are young - Greenberg thirty-seven and Veeck just thirty-four. Greenberg could still be playing! However, I'm seventy-nine, more than their combined ages - remember that and use the authority of my senior status.

It was tricky, thinking about how to influence decisions of the Indians' management with information from their future. Prior to the key point of what to advocate (and when) in acquiring and jettisoning players, there was the questions of whom to approach and how to be believed. The turnover in the Cleveland's ball club both in ownership and management was rapid in those years. Veeck had come to mind immediately as the owner / general manager during the 1948 championship season. But he was there for fewer than four years. Veeck was followed as owner by three others, none of whom stuck around very long. Although Clevelanders, they were not baseball men, and collectively they owned the team only until 1962. The 1960s,

however, were past the span of the Protagonist's intended efforts. Those later teams, although variously benefitting from or handicapped by the legacy of the 1950s, would have to take care of themselves. The Protagonist wanted his intervention to affect the 1949 season as well as subsequent ones through 1960. If somehow the team could win again in 1949, maybe Veeck could retain it instead of selling in order to pay for his divorce settlement - the divorce to come that year.

The other decision maker of that era, Greenberg, had a ten-year run starting in 1948; he was General Manager after 1949 and part owner by 1956. So, Veeck and Greenberg were to be his targets, and, he hoped, his agents.

The Protagonist recalled talking in 2012 with former Indians star Al Rosen. Rosen mentioned his salary negotiation with Greenberg the winter after Rosen's unanimous League MVP season in 1953, when he led the league with 43 homers, 145 runs batted in, and missed the Triple Crown by one hit (one step, in fact, on the last at bat of the season), batting .336 to Mickey Vernon's .337. Greenberg countered Rosen's salary requests then and over the years by comparing Rosen's stats with Greenberg's own back in the 1930s: Greenberg hit 58 home runs one year, and had four seasons exceeding Rosen's high runs batted in mark. This was at a time before there were advanced hitting metrics that took into account contemporary norms. The thirties were a hitters' decade. If Rosen had been armed with modern statistical information, he could have pointed out that his wins above average (WAA) in 1953 was 8.0, higher than Greenberg's in any of the latter's great years. This historical tidbit is tangential, however, except in the context of Rosen and Greenberg's increasingly uncomfortable relationship. Odd, one would think Greenberg would have mentored the new star Jewish slugger, taken him under his wing. Rosen didn't state the reason for the conflict, although the Protagonist suspects it was Greenberg not wishing to acknowledge (nor to pay for) Rosen's accomplishments and stature in the game.

The Protagonist returned to thinking about whether Greenberg along with Veeck would be amenable to his persuasions. Veeck had signed Larry Doby in 1947 to be the American League's first African-American player, and had acquired the legendary Satchel Paige for the team during the season just passed. Doby and Paige, the latter with a 6-1 pitching record, were keys to the Indians' triumph in 1948. Perhaps Veeck and Greenberg would agree to bring Rosen up to the team in 1949 before the current third baseman Ken Keltner's

impending collapse, rather than in 1950, when in the era before the advent of time travel - we'll call it TimeStream 1.0 - Rosen had set the major league record for home runs by a rookie, with 37. Surely Rosen was more than ready for the Big Leagues a year earlier.

So persuading Veeck and Greenberg were the goals. What paths would lead to their trust - first trust that he had knowledge from the future, and then trust that his baseball recommendations should be heeded? This question had preoccupied the Protagonist's thoughts and planning for several years now; he was prepared and ready. He knew that Veeck was nearing the end of a first marriage, and that he would remarry in 1950. Greenberg was wed to an heiress of the Gimbel department store family in New York; that marriage too would end in divorce some years later. Potential mine fields, especially when approaching Veeck, whose selling of the team after the 1949 season had been necessitated by his divorce settlement. Then again, perhaps the personal information could be used to persuade the younger men of the Protagonist's veracity.

The Time Traveler's path intersected Veeck's and Greenberg's in front of the stadium gate leading to the team offices, right under the large "Chief Wahoo" sign. They may think I'm crazy, he thought, but here goes. "Bill, Hank, congratulations on the great year. My name is Simon Morely. I'll be brief. Here's the deal. I know what's going to happen with the team and in your lives. I have money to invest in the team - enough to pay for your divorce settlement next year, Bill, so you won't have to sell the team. Bill, next year you will meet your new wife. You'll marry her in 1950. I know her name, and I know you will have six - yes six - kids together. Hank, you'll have three children with Caral. But you too will get divorced eventually and have a second wife later on. You'll be elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1956. You'll be pictured on a U. S. postage stamp in 2006. Bill, by the way, you'll be elected to the Hall of Fame too, in 1991. Now before you call me crazy, here is proof: next Tuesday's election results, here they are. Truman will win." He handed Veeck the sheet of typewritten paper with the following week's election numbers, nationally and for the State of Ohio - there were no computer printouts in 1948. "As for the team, we'll talk more about players next time I see you. All I'll tell you now is that Keltner is done, also Bearden is done. Neither has remaining value as a player. Remember this and see how they do next year, if you doubt my legitimacy and truthfulness, and doubt my advice. Although you'll lose a year if you do this. If you do nothing, the team will win 89 games next year and come in third. Again, know my name - it is Simon

Morely. I'm staying at the Colonial Hotel, room 205. I'll be back right here at three p.m. next Thursday. The election count will be complete by then; check it against what's on this paper I just gave you. And as weird as this all sounds, don't blow it - the team's future and your personal futures depend on information you can get only from me. I know what roster moves you should make. I'm not going to say anything more now - remember: election results on this paper. One week from now - next Thursday, three p.m., here." And he turned on his heel and walked away, leaving Veeck and Greenberg before they could muster a response.

The Simon Morely pseudonym was the name of the time traveler in Jack Finney's novel *Time and Again*. It was the Old Man's private joke and homage to time travel literature. Published in 1970, the book and the name were unknown in 1948.

Back at the hotel, the Protagonist went over the meeting - actually it was just his little speech - in his mind. It had been awkward to be sure - how could it have been otherwise? He deliberately hadn't given the two time to react; they needed to absorb the encounter. He figured that he had a fair chance of being believed versus being written off and rejected out of hand. He hoped the election results would make the difference. The smart money was still on Dewey, although Truman had been narrowing the gap in recent polling.

Anyway, he had planted the seed. This needn't be his only attempt to influence them. If they weren't receptive, he could always reappear later in their time (which only needed to be after a week or so back in his) and try again. If they hadn't done what he suggested in the "now" of 1948 he would give them more tips, and more time travel evidence. Each time he went back - if there were to be more occasions - the trip would generate a new time stream, a new course of events, a new reality. He had already; it was now TimeStream 2.0 based simply on his having traveled back this once, and the real, if perhaps minuscule, difference he had made so far - in 1.0 Veeck and Greenberg had not been approached by an old guy with a message.

He would closely limit the information conveyed on his time trips for three reasons: first, to ensure that Veeck and Greenberg were still with Cleveland so they would not use information from the future for another team's benefit. They would have to be watched closely to ensure that they were acting in good faith. Although both were closely associated with the Indians historically, neither was particularly loyal to Cleveland, the team, or the city as home of the team. Veeck was something of a gadfly and disrupter; he had, after all, jumped from

franchise to franchise in TimeStream 1.0. And Greenberg as part owner years later had attempted to move the Cleveland club to Minneapolis, and had left the organization when the other owners had refused.

The Protagonist was a Cleveland Indians guy through and through. Neither Veeck nor Greenberg were. They have no inherent loyalty - remember that. Keep them both on a short leash, because once they believe you, they'll want to know everything, he said to himself. Perhaps come back yearly or every other year to advise them about new player signings and trades.

A second reason for wanting to visit the past only rarely, in necessity, and not being a frequent commuter, was to minimize wear and tear on himself, the effects of time travel on the human body being unclear - aside from the basic fact that time in the past counts against time in the present in a one-to-one ratio. The Time Traveler had experienced no untoward effects from the two trial runs he had made into the past previously. But he was not young.

The third and by far most important reason for minimizing time trips and interventions is to tamp down the likelihood of inadvertently creating undesirable changes in historical reality. That is definitely a concern!

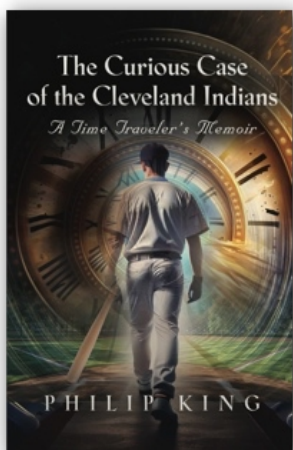
Well, he had a week until next Thursday. No sense in going back to 2022 and then having to make, and risk, another trip. Nothing here in 1948 in particular to do; he wouldn't risk encountering Cleveland relatives - his grandmother or uncle and his recent bride. And certainly not his parents' young family in the downstate Ohio town - himself still five, his sister at three and infant brother. Unlikely that reality would be significantly altered by such meetings, especially if he didn't announce who he was. But even observing without interacting might backfire. So why take the chance, unnecessary as it was to his mission and purpose?

Although who hasn't wished as an adult to be able to speak to one's younger self, or to one's younger parents, to offer guidance and reassurance about life to come, how to view oneself, or how to raise the kids? It wouldn't register with a five-year-old, but with the parents? As he thought more about it, he knew that the one influence he would most hope to muster with his family wouldn't be relevant until a few years later when his brother at age six would have an adenoid condition and be given radiation to the soft palate - the medical treatment of the day. The brother in his early fifties developed glioblastoma, a virulent brain cancer, and died a few months after

diagnosis. It was not known if the radiation treatment in childhood had caused – or contributed to - the cancer, but it could have. Anyway, it was too early to deal with that matter as his brother was not quite a year old then, in 1948.

Sitting in his room at the Colonial Hotel, this was all too much thinking. He went down to the lobby and shot a couple of games in the red velvet billiards room next to the bar, exchanging greetings with others but mainly keeping to himself. Back in his room, he looked out the window which fronted Prospect Avenue, toward the spot where Jacobs Field - later to be renamed Progressive Field - would be built in 1993. He felt restless - he needed to get out. He could use some clothes, he figured, to supplement those brought from 2022 that could pass for authentic 1948 items. He left the hotel, walked down Prospect to Fourth Street, turned right toward downtown, then to Higbee's Department Store near the Terminal Tower. He knew about Higbee's from his mother who had worked there as a salesgirl and part-time model during her college days in the 1930s. At Higbee's he bought a couple of pairs of slacks - with pleats and slightly pegged at the cuffs - late 40s style, no doubt about it - and a sweater, some shirts and underwear, all paid for with vintage cash thoughtfully provided earlier by the time travel staff back home.

The dreaming Man has gone back in time about ten years, from the 1960s to the 1950s. He is visiting a hospital. He can give them information from their future which will help save patients and also make the hospital more successful financially. He asks to see the head nurse. He is in a room with the nurse and another woman and a man - two more nurses, he thinks. He tells them that radiation therapy will be the next big thing in hospital care and that they should invest resources in it. He asks "what year is this, anyway, 1952?" They laugh and say "no, it's 1953." He says (covering from the fact that he is a visitor from the future) "Oh, that's right; I misspoke." Then he tells them that he's from 1964 and he knows how the future will unfold.



An old man travels in time back seventy-five years to improve the fortunes of his favorite baseball team – the Cleveland Indians. The story is lodged in the author's real life experiences, and is therefore is a memoir as well as fiction.

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