

ON CATCHING HECK FOR
NOT CATCHING A BASEBALL

Second Thoughts

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Holden Caulfield, lead character in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, tells this story of his brother who has a left-handed baseball glove, because, well, he is left-handed.

Salinger has Holden saying: "The thing that was so descriptive about it, though, was that he (the left-handed brother) had poems written all over the fingers and the pocket and everywhere. He wrote them on it so that he'd something to read when he was in the field and nobody was up to bat."

Although I am not left-handed, albeit my team captain accused me of having two left hands, I understand the brother's thinking. I never wrote poems or anything else on a baseball glove. I never owned a baseball glove. Few of the other boys in my era and in my neighborhood owned baseball gloves.

We didn't even own a baseball. Balls were homemade by simply winding string around a core of rubber then using course thread to keep it from raveling. Innovative. Our homemade balls were not as good as store bought ones, but they sufficed.

So, unlike Holden's brother, we couldn't write poems on our gloves. Most of us would never have desecrated a store bought baseball glove with poetry, anyway. We would have had too much respect for a glove.

At that age, I knew a few poems taught me by Mama, but I was not into poetry. I was into adventure stories. Stories of pioneers or of the Canadian northwest or about daring Americans in the Old West.

Come to think of it, why do we label citizens of the United States *Americans* but citizens of Canada *Canadians* and citizens of Mexico *Mexicans*? Indeed, are not citizens of South American countries as much entitled to the term *Americans* as citizens of North America?

All of which has little to do with me and my two left hands standing in left field and thinking about Tarzan.

The incident that set off my embarrassment was not as much an incident as it was a thump! I vaguely recall the sound. It sounded somewhat like a baseball hitting the ground in left field. That was because the sound came from a baseball hitting the ground two feet in front of me in left field.

I paid little attention because I was clearly focused on Tarzan's catching the next swinging vine as he traveled through the jungle. I looked up to see the perpetrator of my predicament rounding third base. The next thin I heard was my friend Peewee – at that stage, my former friend – yelling a message which, translated into acceptable language, went something like this:

“You lunkhead! What in blue blazes are you doing out there? Counting your fingers and toes? Get out of left field! We're better off with nobody than a left fielder who can't see a fly ball hit six inches in front of him.”

He was right, you know. I watched the rest of the game from the sideline as I thought freely and with no distractions about Tarzan and his ape companions.

Having your thoughts somewhere out in left field is hazardous. I don't recommend it when you need to be concentrating on the action. But having a diversion that forces your thoughts away from aggravating intrusions promotes peace of mind. That is my way of inducing sleep when I spring wide awake at 2 a.m.

Also to induce sleep, try named the countries in the Western Hemisphere or try to recall who won the Super Bowl or the World Series or the NCAA men and women's basketball tournaments two years ago.

And if all else fails, read a few pages of the book, *Bathroom Book II*, subtitled “*Single-Sitting Summaries of All Time Great Books*” which, incidentally, has a digest of *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Needless to say, our copy of this book is placed in a strategic location.

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