

Excerpt from “Albert’s Great Adventure”

Now reaching for the remote, Albert starts to flick through the channels, absentmindedly hitting the wrong button, the television becomes a blurring mess of static and noise. Albert covers his ears as the static slowly dims. “Damn it, how am I going to watch the game now.” He then begins to hear the sound of yelling and laughing coming from outside. He is drawn to the front picture window as he lifts the white lace drapes that cover the entire west wall. Looking out the window, he spots several neighborhood children playing a game of baseball. He notices a small boy, barely able to hold the large bat, swinging with such energy he almost knocks himself over, with every attempt. Looking around, Albert grabs his jacket and hat, and glances at his walker. He then grabs his dark oak cane, and heads out the door limping on one leg. Coming out on to his front walkway, the boys fail to notice him, as he limps closer to the gate.

“Hey son! Hey you, the one with the bat, you’re gripping that bat too high,” he yells.

“What?” The boy says looking around.

“The bat, the bat, grip it lower and bring it up over your shoulder,” the boy now trying to take the direction, bends his knees as he lowers his hands bringing the bat up and over his shoulder. “That’s it, that’s it; now try it one more time.” Albert now nods to the pitcher. The pitcher winding up, looks both ways, and glares toward home plate. He then shoots a fast ball, soaring, whizzing through the air. The determined young batter grips the bat tighter as the ball comes sailing closer. The brown haired boy, swinging with all his might, closes his eyes as the ball goes wailing right past him. A rush of wind following the ball, nearly knocks him over.

“No, no, son, you’ve got to keep your eyes open, keep your eyes on the ball,” Albert shouts over the fence, “Try it again, one more time,” now hobbling over toward the gate.

The pitcher reaches up to catch the ball from the catcher, clinching it in his glove as if there is a magnetic pull beckoning the ball back to the glove. He winds up again, looking to the front and the back, like a thief about to strike. Now lifting his foot, knee to his chest, he takes his right arm back, and in an instant sends the ball sailing forward with such power, birds seem to stop in flight, as the ball is now hurling toward the young boy, who is now looking at the ball’s every move, every rise, every fall, as it twists and winds its way toward the makeshift home plate, a large silver hub cap. The young ball player fights the urge to close his eyes, as the ball comes closer, soaring now as if a comet, determined to reach its destination, trying with all its force to avoid the collision, with the large aluminum bat, that anticipates its every move. The brown eyes of the boy widen as he begins to bring the bat around. Carefully keeping his eyes on the ball, he grips the bat with all his might and forces it around. *Crack*, contact is made, sending the ball wailing, screaming over the head of the pitcher, through the beams of the bright sunlight, as the outfielder, stumbling, struggles to see the ball now descending somewhere behind him, as he races back trying to foxy its plan of escape. It lands in center field, near the middle of the street and rolls for what seems like days, as the outfielder heads towards it bearing down on its speed. The small boy now rounding second base, slides into third as the ball comes scowling in behind him, daring him to run. The small boy looks over at Albert and Albert smiles, “That away boy, that away, you got it.”

The boy tips his cap at Albert, as he squats down grabbing his knees, and the other team yells, “Batter up.”

In the distance you can hear a mother yelling, “Dinner!” The children begin to scatter, and the young batter takes off running with increasing speed, the wind, his competitor, and the race now long from over. He runs, jumps, and leaps with admirable precision, onto the front porch, racing through the front door, leaving his adversary outside, awaiting his return.

Albert looks around; the silence of the block now surrounding him. He looks down one side of the street and then down the other side, as he opens the gate to his yard. Bringing the cane down before him he lowers himself onto the stair, then bringing the other foot slowly, gradually, still griping the fence, he lowers his foot to the sidewalk, gasping a sigh of relief. Albert begins to walk north, as his old friend greets him in remembrance, daring him to a race.

“Alright,” Albert responds, “You’re on.”