

Born October 20, 1952, I was one of many in my family who came into this world at Mills Hospital in San Mateo, California. My mother and both of my brothers had been born there too. Most members of the previous two generations from both sides of my family were also raised on the San Francisco Peninsula. Many relatives from the East Coast and Midwest migrated to California during the Gold Rush, while others followed after the railroads came west. I have enjoyed researching the various branches of my family tree. Quite honestly, it would be better described as a forest! Ten or more children were commonplace with some of my earlier ancestors.

The Giants won the World Series in New York in 1954 when I was two years old, and no, I do not remember it! I was six years old when they came to San Francisco in 1958, where they played at Seals Stadium, and yes, I vaguely remember going to games there. They moved to Candlestick Park in 1960, when I was 8 years old. I had just turned 58 when they won their first World Series in 2010 as the San Francisco Giants! It sure took a long time. What a fantastic year it was for San Francisco and local fans. They repeated as World Series Champions again in 2012. Yes, I am a fan and long-time season ticket holder. My wife and I share two tickets with three other couples.

When I was a child, baseball was my life. It was in my blood. Dad was the Little League manager for the team my brother Rob and I played on. In our eyes, he was as powerful as the President of the United States! It was what we enjoyed most as a family. I have forgotten what we used to do during the winters; we were probably eagerly anticipating the next baseball season!

Baseball taught us essential life skills, including how to be part of a team, how to compete, how to give something your all, and how to strive for excellence. Baseball primed us for the American Dream of life as middle-class Americans.

I was the third of six children. First there were three boys, and then three girls. Good Catholics did not practice any form of birth control. The idea was to multiply in sizeable numbers so that the church would flourish with parishioners.

During my first month of life, I had a hernia in my right groin area which was surgically corrected. A hairline scar is all that remains. I likely would not have even noticed it if I was never told about the operation. Of course, later in life, both of my older brothers attempted to convince me that it was part of a sex change operation! (You know how siblings can be! I would have teased a younger brother too, but there were three girls after me!)

I was asthmatic with allergies and had eczema throughout childhood. I have outgrown most of these symptoms, but still have minor outbreaks from time to time. As a toddler, I was admitted to a hospital intensive care unit and placed in an oxygen tent for approximately two weeks. My mother told me that a priest administered my last rites because the doctor did not think I was going to pull through. As a teenager, I was tested for various types of allergens and was found to be extremely allergic to cat dander. This was indeed the most potent trigger for my asthma attacks. Perhaps this is the reason I am such a dog lover today. But I was always an overachiever and never allowed asthma or allergies to get in the way of my physical activity.

A Formative Incident

Something happened when I was four years old that gave rise to contrasting emotions: anger and disappointment on the one hand, and peacefulness and bliss on the other. On the surface, the event may sound trivial. However, it was very significant for me.

I was in my backyard and suddenly heard the glorious music that was unmistakably the sound of the local neighborhood ice cream truck. Nothing could have moved me quicker than that sound. I responded like Pavlov's Dog. As I ran excitedly from the backyard to the front of the house, I saw both of my brothers lapping their tongues on drumstick ice cream cones. The ice cream truck was already halfway down the block, and I did not have a cone of my own. I began to cry and begged my brothers to give me money so I could buy one for myself.

My brothers Hal and Rob were eight and five years old, respectively. I'm certain you know the term "Boys will be boys." Hal reluctantly reached into his pocket and handed me its contents. Thrilled, I dashed down the street in gleeful anticipation of my own precious ice cream. I finally caught up to the ice cream truck, which had stopped for other customers. I patiently awaited my turn and politely requested a drumstick. The salesperson handed me the drumstick and asked for payment. I promptly handed him what Hal had given me only moments before.

Lo and behold, I had handed him washers that Hal had apparently stowed in his pocket, which originated from the garage fastener cabinets! The salesman explained that this was not money and proceeded to repossess the drumstick. I began sobbing a flood of angry tears. Within seconds, the ice cream man handed me back the drumstick and kept the washers as payment! Thus, peacefulness and bliss abruptly replaced my anger and disappointment!

Later in life, I realized that this was my first major experience of gratitude. Of course, nobody wants to hear a screaming four-year-old, but I perceived that this ice cream man was

truly a kind and compassionate person. And this was a breakthrough moment for me; it was the moment I first began to observe and appreciate the finest in people. It would be gratifying to go back and tell this humble ice cream salesman what a truly extraordinary person he was and what an influence he had on my life. That minute of interaction had a beneficial impact that has lasted nearly sixty years. Realistically, he is probably no longer alive. He was perhaps 35 years old, 56 years ago! But he does live on in my memories. Every time I hear the music from an ice cream truck, I think of him. I think about how many other children he befriended. Sometimes I'll look to see if other ice cream salespersons also have a distinctive smile.