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Holding on

My teammates and I turn our backs to the field in disappointment seconds after we watch the Trinity University Center fielder glide to his left and put away a deep fly ball for the 27th out. In the webbing of his glove sits the final out and with that he carries with him the end of the SCAC conference tournament championship, our hopes of reaching a regional, and for many of my teammates the end of a long playing career.

As I look around our dugout filled with cracked sunflower seeds and spilt Gatorade, time slows down. An announcement comes in clear over the speakers that encompass the ballpark in Seguin, Texas, the host city for the 2016 SCAC Tournament.

“Congratulations to the Trinity Tigers on winning the SCAC Championship!”

I somberly move over to the bench and take a seat next to one of my best friends, a guy who took me under his wing during our time together as Pirates, Matt Litz. I put my arm around my Senior teammate who has his head buried deep inside his chest. I slowly pick his chin up and look into his eyes.

“It’ll be alright Matty.” *While asking myself, crap... will it be “alright”?*

“Thanks Kev, it has been a fun ride man. Y’all will get them next year!” he says, holding back his emotion as best he can.

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“Here come your Anaheim Angels!” Exclaims the announcer.

My dad turns to me “Kev, look. There’s Ken Griffey Jr. on deck!”

I don’t reply. I am speechless as I watch 9 big league players take the field for the first time in my life. I look to my left and watch catcher Benji Molina toss a ball into the stands, making a grown man’s day as he hands it to his young daughter. I am 6 years old and sit ten rows back behind home plate in Angel Stadium in Anaheim, California. The Angels are taking on the Mariners in a matinee Major League Baseball game. I am so mesmerized by everything taking place, my dad holds zero of my attention.

I admire the style, confidence, and chemistry these men in front of me behold. Everything from the lights on the scoreboard to the pattern and color of the grass confiscates my attention. My mind is so excited as I start to comprehend that this is more than a game, but an art. I can’t help but notice the fun these players have together as they glide from one part of the field to the next, perfectly timing their footwork to correspond to each other’s throws to record an out. I can feel myself becoming more and more romantic about the actions of each player. I tell myself from this day forward I am determined to be a part of the rhythm, excitement, and teamwork that is being put on display in front of me. I turn to my left.

“Dad I want to be a baseball player when I grow up!”

He looks at me with nothing to say and smiles.

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I walk slowly over to my bag to start packing up my catcher’s gear. The dugout is silent and some of my teammates’ attention turns back to the field as they can’t help but gaze over at

the dog-pile and celebration that is taking place at the center of the diamond. The crowd's applause grows stronger as the SCAC Championship trophy is being ushered to the field by the sharply dressed president of the conference. My attention turns back to my teammates. The returning players begin hugging those who have exhausted their four years of eligibility and are going on their way to venture out into the real world. As I move from one guy to the next, sending each senior off with a hug, I can't help but bring the situation back to myself. I come to the realization that I only have one more season of collegiate baseball eligibility left.

I begin to think of the hours I spent from Tee Ball to College with so many great teammates. I come across fellow Junior and my roommate Austyn Laird on the side of the dugout.

"Crazy to think 16 seasons in the game can end just like that," I say.

Austyn replies, "Let's make next year a memorable one!"

"I can't even picture life after baseball."

"There's more to life than just baseball man, you'll find for yourself" said Austyn as he begins walking away to embrace our senior teammate Will Cates.

I walk over to the bench and pull out my turf shoes to prepare to exit for the bus. I start untying my worn out cleats. I pause. I look up out at the field and I am hit with a wave of emotions. I ask myself, how can anyone say its just baseball?

I begin to think of the opportunities baseball has brought to my life and then even more so the sacrifices I made for this game. Did the game pay me back for what I've given to it? I start to get more upset. I get the feeling that this game owes me something for the amount I put into it. I think about the countless swings, bullpens, blocking drills, early mornings, late nights, and missed holidays. It can't end so abruptly can it?

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Reno, Nevada, known as a gambling city. Reno is also my hometown and a city in which I spent 12 years believing I had life figured out. In a way every time I come back here I get a certain sense of heroism. Not that I am famous in my hometown, but heck its hard not to feel good about yourself when you go to the local restaurant and find your high school baseball picture hanging on the wall. Reno was a time in my life when I had a hot hand and it seemed like every hand I played was the right one.

I saw a lot of success both in life and in the game of baseball during my time in Reno. When I say Reno is Gambling city I mention it only for this reason, getting involved in the game of baseball is a gamble and one you really don't realize until you come back home two years after high school with your tail between your legs. Here I sit in my mom's house. I have just finished my sophomore year of college. And just two short years after leaving behind a successful high school baseball career I feel lost in a world that always seemed so sure.

I had turned down multiple offers to Universities out of high school to try my hand at a junior college, which was the route to go if you were bold enough to try and find a bigger and better school to offer you more scholarship money or get drafted. Lets just say I didn't play my very best baseball in my two years at my junior college in California. Now I sit here, at the beginning of June with very limited opportunities to continue playing as enrollment for the fall is quickly approaching.

To make matters more frustrating I'm hearing news of guys who hadn't made themselves great high school baseball players, creating a future for themselves at the highest levels of baseball. I realize at this moment baseball is like gambling, because if you're hot at the right time

in right place you may just win and create yourself. And in my case like many others hit a cold streak at the wrong time and fight for your life to keep a jersey on your back.

Now the question of whether I will ever play again creeps into my mind and I'm sick to my stomach thinking about that possibility. I'm sitting on the living room couch and I begin to question myself more than ever. *Where did I go wrong? Did I not work hard enough? Did I put too much pressure on myself to perform?* I flip on the T.V. its MLB Network a regular in our household; it's hard for it not to be when your stepfather played nine years professionally and is the catching coordinator for the Texas Rangers.

A vibration comes from the coffee table in front of me. I grab my cell phone to find an out of state number. My hearts fills with joy. Unknown numbers become a welcome occurrence when you are in the middle of the waiting game that is recruiting.

"Hello?"

"Hi, is this Kevin Wallace?"

"Yes sir"

"Hey, this is Rj Thomas, head baseball coach at Southwestern University..."

Just like that my mind is at ease, and I think to myself I'm still holding on.

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At this point we have worn out our welcome in Seguin. As I look around at many of the disappointed faces, it's safe to say we all yearn to get back to the friendly confines of Georgetown and Southwestern. With our bags packed we get one last break as a family before getting on the bus.

"Bucs on three," Senior Will Cates shouts.

"1...2...3... Bucs," We yell in sync.

At this moment my world becomes sort of surreal. I start to picture myself getting on that bus one last time with one last group of guys as we make our way to the exit of the stadium. I start to get these flashbacks in my mind and I'm having déjà vu about leaving my last high school after losing the State Championship in Las Vegas. This brings in an overwhelming experience that I have never had before. The best way I can describe is like the way people explain seeing their life flash before their eyes.

I am flooded with memories of little league, travel ball, prep, high school, and college. The weird thing is I can't see any baseball highlights. All I can see are faces that supported and surrounded me throughout my time in the game. I see parents, fans, coaches, and most importantly my teammates from over the years. I quickly become overjoyed with all that I have been given through the game. I think of the lifelong friends and the relationships I built and how this game has given me a foundation to continue building as a person.

The experience on my way back to the bus makes me look back at why I started playing the game. I think back to my first Major League Baseball game. Why did I fall in love with this game? I loved the passion, the excitement, and the relationships you clearly see being put together on a baseball field. I may not be on the fast track to the Big Leagues, a top prospect in Double A, or signing for little kids aspiring to be in my shoes but, for 16 years in this game I have been given so much.

Through the really good and the really bad, I was given an opportunity. I have been given an opportunity to succeed to fail, to grow and shape my own identity, and most importantly to make connections with others every single day. I still can't fully wrap my head around why it has to end sometime in the near future. But I can wrap arms around my parents, teammates, and coaches for giving me support, memories, and lessons that will live on in my memory forever.

This last year for me will be a celebration of my time in the game. I want to play everyday with the level of passion I had for it on the day I was introduced to it 16 years ago. That is the best way for me as of right now, to spend one more year in the sun.

As a group we walk past a group of Southwestern parents.

“We’ll get them next year boys!” they yell.

I turn and look at them, smiling.

Author’s Afterwords...

For me narrative writing is a new territory. I struggled at some points to find my voice and to create a narrative line or main idea. I enjoyed this writing this piece in particular so much, because in a way it offered me closure. Being able to write out my true feelings about my career ending in baseball gave me true satisfaction as did profiling and telling others stories. As the assignments passed the more comfortable I became in organizing my notes and creating pieces that contained both a developing story and developing idea.

To me this class was more than just learning how to write for audiences, critiquing work, and meeting deadlines. The writing in this class offered valuable insight into the world around us, investigating many different cultures, identities, and ambitions through Narrative writing. Reading other pieces from my peers gave me a broader understanding of both writing nonfiction narrative and how to perceive and represent the realities that surround us.

I have acted with honesty and integrity in producing this work and am unaware of anyone who has not.

Kevin Wallace