The Big Kid

There comes a moment when a young person begins looking at his or her parents as just plain people.

I recall that change with my father, who, I learned, was still a big kid at heart. But this revelation came to me as the sum of several circumstances, not as a single incident. ­­­ Coincidently – or perhaps not, because a love of sports was something we shared – the more memorable were sporting-related.

I saw the first evidence at 10 or 11, when NHL’ers Gordie Howe, Dave Keon, and Mike Walton each made promotional appearances at the local Eaton’s department store. It was *he* who bugged *me* about going, not the other way around. But at that age, I truly didn’t grasp the significance of our role reversal.

But at 18, I did.

That was the year when, through a series of unlikely events, I found myself Sports Editor of the local weekly. The newspaper hosted an annual weekend excursion to Montreal to watch the Major League Baseball Expos play, back in the days when blue jays were just colourful backyard birds. In my capacity, I was expected to be part of the trip, and my Dad, ever the baseball nut, was enthusiastic to join me.

As an accredited reporter, I had pre-game access to the press lounge at Jarry Park, where the Expos played their home games in those days. My father, I told the security dude with a straight face, was our paper’s photographer who’d carelessly left his press pass behind. The guard looked us over, double-checked my paperwork, then indifferently waved both of us inside.

As I scanned the room for the buffet table, I saw my father’s eyes widen like saucers. I followed his gaze to a middle-aged man who stood out among the crowd: a handsome face, a great shock of reddish hair tinged with distinguished silver, wearing a suit even an 18-year old could recognize as expensively tailored.

“That’s Vin Scully!!” the Big Kid sputtered.

I knew the name; my Dad supplied the details. Scully was the dean of baseball broadcasters, he told me, who’d cut his teeth in the business decades before as the play-by-play voice of the Brooklyn Dodgers, my father’s favourite team growing up. When the Brooklyn franchise migrated west in the late 50’s to become the *Los Angeles* Dodgers, Scully moved as well. In California, he expanded his profile to include weekly national broadcasts and, eventually, prestigious World Series games.

“Why don’t you go speak to him?” I suggested to my starstruck parent. “You’ll never get another chance!”

So he did. Scully was personable and accommodating, answering a couple of Brooklyn-related questions from a guy he clearly didn’t know from a bag of old baseballs. For his part, my father had the good sense to end the conversation before he’d overstayed his welcome, closing with a “thanks for the memories” comment before turning to go. I’d swear, his feet didn’t touch the ground the rest of the day.

A recent headline in the sports section of *The Toronto Star* brought those long-ago events back to mind. It announced that veteran broadcaster Vin Scully had passed away peacefully of natural causes at the ripe old age of 94. The article below it was chock full of glowing tributes from contemporary sporting-media personalities, many of whom named Scully as their professional inspiration and proclaimed him the greatest of all-time.

If he’d still been alive to read the piece, I’m sure my father would have strongly agreed with that assessment, then paused a moment before adding an anecdote of his own: “I remember that time: Scott and I were in Montreal….”

Rest in peace, Dad. And you too, Mr. Scully.