

THE DAY I CHOSE BUDDHISM OVER BASEBALL

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1995

The Cleveland Indians make it to the World Series. They lose. But the “mistake on the lake” was about an hour and a half away from my boyhood yellow home. I chose them to be my team. Makes sense, I suppose.

My Uncle called me a fair weather fan. I asked him what that meant. *Means you're rooting for whichever team is winning. Means you're not loyal*, he said. And he practiced what he preached. You see he liked the Pirates. Pittsburgh was closer to us than Cleveland, but the Pirates were lousy, last place, cellar dwellers. I wanted to root for a winner.

1997

The Cleveland Indians make it to the World Series. They lose. Jose Mesa blew the save. I fell asleep watching it. But I read about it in the paper the next day and subsequently destroyed every baseball card with his face on it. Later that year I'll kill my first squirrel and see my first nude woman. I'll cry both times.

The Cleveland Indians make it to the World Series. I sat on a couch in the student common area. There were three others around me. No one watches baseball anymore. Fifty years ago, cities shut down because of game sevens. It felt odd. I felt odd. I didn't like the feeling. I was used to losing. Sure, there was the 2007 ALCS, but they lost four in row to the Red Sox. The Wild Card birth two years back didn't really count either.

During a commercial break, I suddenly wished that I could speak with my dead uncle, telling him I'd become a foul weather fan, and that I was sorry for how wasted I got at his funeral, and that I'd used his grave twice now as an altar, praying to God about things I don't understand, and that every time I think of his name, Gordon Payne, I think of snow, of pure white unadulterated snow.

After the seventh inning stretch, I left. I had a Buddhism exam at 9:00 am. And so I turned off my phone, went home, memorized terms like the *Lotus Sutra*, and marveled at things like the life of Shinran, knowing full well that I had forsaken the World Series willingly, that I had forsaken my team willingly.

In the morning, I read about what I missed: the historical extra inning finish, in the form of a loss for Cleveland. I ate breakfast. Eggs. I went to class. I took the test. I got an A.