

## GEORGE "RED" SANDLER

February 21, 1908 - February 28, 2005

My father was born and raised in Lowell, Massachusetts. He had two older brothers (Sam and Ben) and four sisters, Jeannette and Zelda, who were younger, Madelyn and Vina, who was the oldest. Jeannette, the youngest, died at age 43. The others all lived long lives, but my father lived ten years longer than Vina and Madelyn, who were each 87 when they passed away.

Due to his long life, my father was one of the few people who actually was alive when the Red Sox won an earlier World Series, in 1918 as well as the more recent one in 2004. In fact, they won three other World Series earlier in his life.

My father left school early to help support the family, but I am not sure where he worked or what he did. I do know that he was a fine athlete, and in particular, a regionally renowned baseball pitcher. He played semi-pro baseball in a County league from the age of 19 to 29, and apparently supported himself from his earnings. He was paid \$100 a game and played as many as three games a week. He was quoted in an article about him that was written after he moved to Wilmington saying "I was born too soon." I like to think he might have been as famous as Sandy Koufax. He told me he played against Boston Braves and Red Sox players on occasion. His favorite pitch was what he called a "drop," which I believe is now known as a "sinker."

I have an article from The Lowell Sun describing one of his victories - the headline says "Red Sandler Stars Both at Bat and on Mound." He pitched a five-hitter that day. There is also a picture of him and some teammates in a book called "The Jews of Lowell," wearing uniforms that had been incorrectly labeled "Morgan (sic) David."

I was told recently that my father was asked to try out for a major league team, some said it was the Red Sox, others the Philadelphia team, either the Phillies or Athletics. He did not because his parents were concerned that he would not be able to get Kosher food. This raises an interesting, more general question, as to whether this same concern limited the number of Jewish baseball players in the twenties and thirties. I wonder if Hank Greenberg faced similar objections?

My cousin Steve Resnick related a story to me recently that underscored my father's local prominence. Steve, who was a CPA working for Monsanto at the

time, was having his office painted and one of the workers asked him where he was from. When he said his mother's family was from Lowell and told the worker Aunt Madelyn's maiden name, the man asked if he was related to Red Sandler, the famous pitcher. After Steve confirmed that Red Sandler was his uncle, four or five other people told him in the next day or two that they also knew Red Sandler. Other relatives have related similar stories.

My father's pitching career was prematurely ended when he "chipped his arm." I'm not quite sure what that means, probably that he had bone chips, but he said his mother didn't want him to have an operation to fix it, so he retired and went into the liquor business. At some point, I'm not certain when, he became the owner of "The Middlesex Tap," a tavern in Lowell, and later added a package store in Dracut, Mass., near the New Hampshire line (something I wondered about in later years, since I had always heard that people went to New Hampshire to buy liquor because there were no taxes). An article about my father described the Middlesex Tap as a "dine and dance cafe." My recollection is that it was mostly for serious drinkers, but I'd be interested in other people's recollections.

In or around 1939, at the age of 31, my father married Sarah Caplin. I was born two years later, on June 13, 1941. I am told I was the apple of my parents' eye, and I have no doubt this was true. My mother's Aunt, Annie Wishney, known as "Aunt Genendel," lived with us and helped my parents raise me (and did most of the cooking).

My parents didn't travel much, but I do recall pictures of them at the 1939 New York World's Fair (maybe their honeymoon), and one or two childhood trips to New York City, where some family on both sides lived.

My father was a wonderful husband and father, as well as a favorite uncle to his many nieces and nephews, some of whom had more of an older brother relationship with him. A lot of his limited leisure time was spent going to family functions either in Salem, where most of my mother's family lived, or in the Boston area, where the Sandler family was centered.

My father was also a terrific breadwinner; his work schedule was a heavy one. He would get up early and arrive at the Middlesex Tap at 7, to greet the lineup of eager early imbibers, and work till 2:45 p.m. He would come home, take a nap, have dinner, and work at the package store from 6 to 11. He did that 6 days a week (he may have worked half a day on Saturday - I don't remember for sure) and he

had Sunday off. We would usually drive to Salem or Boston on Sunday to visit relatives.

Sometimes when the weather was good, my father and I would play baseball in our back yard. He was especially pleased that I could "bat left and right," and would boast to his friends about that. Of course, when I batted left I couldn't hit anything, but my father's pride in his son caused him to ignore that.

We would also go to Boston Braves and Red Sox games. One of my clearest memories is when my father took me to a Red Sox game right after Ted Williams returned from the Korean War. Ted Williams hit a home run that day, August 9, 1953. My father followed the Red Sox closely for many years and always had keen observations about them. Although in his last years, he seemed to lose interest, when I told him the Red Sox had finally won another World Series, he perked up.

In the summer, we went to the beach, first Magnolia and then Salisbury Beach. My father would come down on the weekends. I remember one time he surprised us by pulling up in a new car, a Ford. He later bought a Cadillac, a Lincoln and a Chrysler at various times. His interest in cars is something that was passed on to me.

Another memory I have is going to the Elks Lodge with my father and being taught by him how to shower. We lived in a rented "duplex" and it had a bath but no shower. My father was in the Benevolent Protective Order of Elks for many years, and later became active in the Masons, whose ring he wore proudly for the balance of his life. He still had it on the week he passed away.

He was also a bit of a local politician in Lowell. He even ran for Lowell City Council once, and although he didn't win, my recollection is that he got the most votes of any of the nonincumbents. He sometimes used his political connections to get me summer jobs during college. The jobs he got me contributed greatly to my future career choice. I especially remember my first day working on a Lowell garbage truck, when someone threw away a carp and it got stuck in the back of the truck and the sweeping device did not work to sweep it into the truck. As the junior crew member, I was appointed to dislodge the smelly fish. Another time he got me a summer job with the street department. A truck with a heating device attached would melt the tar on the road, and we would shovel it into the truck. It proved a good way to lose some weight.

My father's red hair branded him in many people's eyes as Irish, one of polyglot Lowell's many ethnic groups. I recall a time when I and some others in a road crew were digging a large hole and the foreman came along and said in a loud voice, we're all Irish here, aren't we!" In those days of more overt anti-Semitism, I didn't disagree.

Once I went off to college and then law school, my parents moved from the rented duplex at 22 Edson St. in "the Highlands" to 58 Elmont Road in an outlying area of Lowell, and my father became a suburban homeowner. He began doing lawn work and keeping busy with the usual chores of home upkeep.

When I got lucky and married Susan in 1965, my father had another lifelong soulmate. They formed a special close relationship that continued for the remainder of his life. I am so grateful to Susan for all she did for my father and I know that there is nobody that will miss him more than Susan.

After he sold his two stores and "retired," my parents sold their house and moved to an apartment in Peabody, MA, near my mother's family, and my father got a job at Raytheon. He was some sort of quality inspector. I'm not exactly sure what he did, but I remember him being bemused by the job, describing it basically as sitting around all day doing almost nothing. Maybe he was an early participant in Total Quality Management.

As time went on, my mother gradually became more unwilling to leave the house, and the demands placed on my father increased. In those years, my father's effort was nothing short of extraordinary. He did the shopping, most of the housework, and anything else that had to be done. In his years in Peabody after he retired from Raytheon, he would stay in shape by walking to Salem and back, which he told me was a 13 mile walk. Sometimes he would stop to rest at the office of Bill Norman, an optometrist in Salem, who was the husband of my first cousin on my mother's side, Barbara Norman. Of course he knew everybody along his waling route and made friends with them, a lifelong pattern.

When Julie and Alison arrived, in 1967 and 1970, my father was especially pleased. He was always great with children. Even when my mother was unable or unwilling to travel, he made a special effort to visit us, and was in attendance for both of my daughter's bat mitzvahs. I recall him also traveling to Chicago for my first cousin Marlene and Harold Bloom's son Joel's wedding, where he had a great time and was photographed with his sisters.

Toward the end of my mother's life, my father's plight became even harder. He was able to leave the house for only a few minutes at a time, like a yo-yo, before he had to run back to reassure my mother. It was a difficult time, but he met the challenge with his usual kindness and good nature. When my mother passed away, I asked my father if he would like to move to Wilmington, where he could be close to us. Remember that he had essentially never been out of Eastern Massachusetts, except for brief periods. Without hesitation, he answered "yes" and quickly relocated. And his second life began.

This was characteristic of my father. He always looked ahead and did not agonize over the past. He took an apartment near the Orthodox Synagogue in Wilmington, and became a regular member of the daily Minyan. He joined the Jewish Community Center, where he both worked out and helped out. He exercised daily and became the token male in the JCC aerobics class. On Fridays, he sold Challah in the Early Childhood area, and made friends with everybody, especially the children. Even now many people tell me that their children knew my father from the JCC, where he was "the Challah man." In fact, within a year or two after he arrived, when we would walk down the street together he would know and greet more people than I did.

Speaking of being forward looking, one time after my father was in Delaware for awhile, he had a lady friend, and was at her apartment when he heard a thump. She had collapsed in the bathroom. He called 911, but she expired in the hospital, of a heart attack. My wife called me at the office, and I rushed to the hospital to console my father. As we were leaving the hospital, my father pulled out a little book, his version of a "little black book," and remarked "Well, I guess I have to find another one." As a vigorous male in his mid-80s, of course he had no trouble doing just that.

And in his 80s, he began playing slow pitch softball at the JCC. I heard about this first when from time to time, some of my partners would tell me that they had played ball with my father at the JCC. This piqued my curiosity and I decided to see what they were talking about. So one day I went to a game, and played on my father's team. He proceeded to pitch a no hitter, arcing the ball just high enough so people had great difficulty timing their swings. And he also batted, with someone running for him. He got several hits. It was such a perfect day, I didn't want to spoil the memory so I never went back, but he continued to play for some years.

During this period, Susan and I had the opportunity to take my father on several trips, before spinal stenosis slowed him down. We went to Disney World with

Julie and Alison, and even more memorably, traveled with him to Israel, where he visited many historic sites and even rode on a very swaybacked camel.

And during his time in Delaware, he had a special lady friend, Sara Berman, with whom he traveled a good deal. On one occasion, they even returned to Boston, and were photographed in front of Quincy Market. Ironically, Sara is now also in The Kutz Home, where my father spent the last five years. She is a spirited and talented lady who, for years, has played the piano for the residents at the Kutz Home every Monday.

One of our pleasant memories was going to lunch on Saturdays with my father at Howard Johnson's. In fact, I remember one time, when he asked me to drop him off closer to the entrance, as the time when I began to think for the first time that he might be slowing down.

My father continued to drive until well into his late 80s. One time Julie and Alison were in the car on Rte 202 near the entrance to Rte 95 and saw a car driving erratically and slowly in the same direction they were going. As they pulled past it, they both exclaimed "it's Grandpa!!" Not too long after that we persuaded him that the time had come for him to give up driving.

As time went on, his powerful body began to wear out. The symptoms from a bout of shingles persisted for several years before finally going away. Blemishes began appearing on his face from too many days in the sun without sunscreen, and he began making the first of many trips to the dermatologist. And he had a mild heart attack. Characteristically, he drove himself to the hospital, and after quickly rallying, moved in with us temporarily. I still recall when a field mouse invaded our house while he was staying with us, and he almost had another attack while Susan chased the mouse around the house and finally caught it by covering it with a glass. Once he was better, he moved to an independent living facility, Forwood Manner, where he made so many friends that he had to turn down dinner invitations regularly.

About five years ago, after his physical condition and ability to get around deteriorated due to the spinal stenosis and shingles, he moved to The Kutz Home. Again he made a host of friends. He had an extraordinary ability to remember names, and would greet each of the staff members by name. At the end, there was a regular parade of employees of the Home to his room to hold his hand and tell him how much they loved him. And even at the last, one of the aides told me that

he called her by name ("Mahgret") and squeezed her hand when she came to visit him.

We'll all miss our weekend lunches with him at The Kutz Home, especially Seth and Ariel, who were able to visit with him regularly, and Natalie, whose occasional visits always made him smile. Among his few possessions at the end were cards from his loving nieces and nephews, who always kept in touch with him, as the last of his generation.

And now we're left with the many good memories of an extraordinary man, aptly described in an article in the JCC Newsletter as a "Man for All Seasons" who has "endeared himself to all." I'm sure all of us who had the privilege of knowing him will agree.