

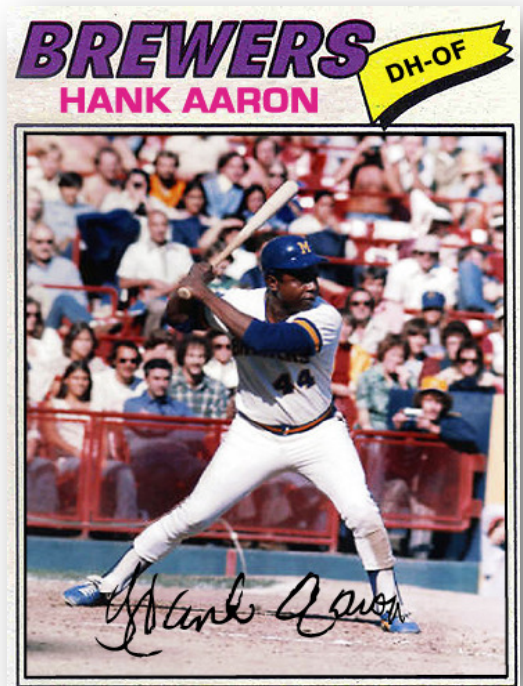
A Story to Warm Your Heart – Acts of Kindness. . .

*We get in return exactly what we give. It all comes back.
Incredible echoes mirror our actions to an empathic degree,
sometimes in greater measure than we give.*

Charles (Chuck) Swindoll

GOD’S LOVE IN A BASEBALL CARD?

by John Nielsen



It is August 1999. We are in a small town in Northern Michigan at our son’s wedding reception. The best man, Doug, is about to make a toast. I look at our son, Ben, and I marvel at the man he has become. My mind drifts away for a moment, reflecting on some events from the last twenty-five years.

It is late March 1974. It is 2 a.m. and I have fallen momentarily asleep. We are at the hospital waiting on the birth of our first child. The doctor nudges my shoulder. “We’re going to have to do a C-section. Labor has not progressed in several hours. The baby is in fetal distress.” Okay. I am worried. There is a blur of activity. My wife only wants relief from the nauseating pain. The surgery is quick. In 1974, most fathers still waited in the fathers’ room. Shortly, the doctor returned. “You have a son. Mother and child are fine.” My mind races with a flood of thoughts: *Is he healthy? Will his mother recover? What will he become? What will we do together?* Soon life returns to normal, and we are grateful to God for his gift to us.

As I begin to listen to the best man’s toast at the wedding, more memories fly by in my thoughts. There was the first fish he caught. Though only a small sunfish, it was an incredible marvel to a four-year-old watching it slowly rise out of the water’s depth. Hunting and fishing were to become his passions. Overtime he devoted most of his spare time and money to these pursuits. We approved. Young people have a difficult enough time growing up in our contemporary society. Because of his love for the outdoors, we never really had to worry about him.

One other interest area captured some of his time between the ages of seven and twelve. Like most boys his age, he loved to collect baseball cards. By whatever means were at his disposal and with great gusto and passion, he collected these cards representing his boyhood heroes. Over time, he amassed a rather large collection. The cards themselves represented carefully saved and spent allowance money, chore money, gifts from friends, holiday stocking stuffers, vacation souvenirs, birthday presents and, of course, the product of

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intricately planned trading sessions with his buddies. Special cards dating back to the early 1950s were purchased or received as gifts.

Then, like many things in life, his interest in sports cards and collecting began to wane. The large box with the card collection found its quiet resting place in the back of a closet as if it were waiting for better days. It was a box of memories and repository of connections with the past.

Back to the wedding. I am looking at Ben's new bride, Andrea. She is beautiful and full of pride for her new husband. It is a special moment. I wonder if she knows how much she means to Ben. A few months earlier Ben had shared his intent with us to marry Andrea. We were pleased but a little taken aback that he was ready to make one of life's most meaningful commitments. His pursuit of his interest areas had not left him well-positioned to buy an engagement ring. As parents we felt that it was important for Ben to find the means to purchase the ring. Our hope was that it would help him realize the extent of the commitment he was making, and it would help him experience the self-sacrifice that goes into making a relationship work.

The process of saving for the ring quickly became tedious. The passions of young love seemed frustrated by the process. Ben came up with the idea of selling his sports card collection. After all, it was worth quite a bit of money by now and it was only gathering dust in the closet. What could be more important than solidifying his relationship with Andrea? After cataloging the cards and getting some idea of their worth, Ben set a price for the collection. A friend's father seemed to see the value in the collection as an investment and he purchased it. Ben couldn't have been happier. Though there was some sense of loss for the collection, he could now go about the business of forming a permanent relationship with Andrea.

Back to the wedding toast. . . The best man, Doug, had just finished describing some of the good times he and Ben had experienced hunting together. He then began telling the story of a young boy's love of his baseball card collection and his ultimate willingness to sell the collection to buy a diamond ring for his wife-to-be. A light hush fell over the reception as the guests began to realize the significance of the sacrifice Ben had made. As Doug proceeded with his toast, many eyes began to well up with tears. Perhaps those listening identified with the loss of something meaningful as part of pursuing a loving relationship.

And then the incredible happened. It was Doug's father who had purchased the card collection several months earlier. In an unbelievable moment of kindness and grace, Doug gave Ben's card collection back to him. It was a stunning reminder of how God's love can be mirrored through us to others.

We will never forget that moment. It was as if time stood still. Briefly, we were able to glimpse part of the true significance of life—through baseball cards!

Now it is October 1999. Ben has his new wife. Their marriage is a joyful thing to behold as they live out their young love for each other. He also has his baseball cards—probably gathering dust in a new closet. You see, it is not the cards and their memories that count. In this instance, these simple sports cards were a clear example of God's unconditional love and grace for us—a gift we can never fully repay. The marriage will grow. The sports cards will be a legacy to pass on. The message of God's awesome grace that they represent will, hopefully, be repeated many times over by those who chose to see it on a summer evening in a small town in Northern Michigan.

Canfield, Jack, et al. *Chicken Soup for the Christian Family Soul*. Deerpark Beach: Health Communications, 2000