

## HANGING ON TO A PRIZE

*While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher any more?" Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "Don't be afraid; just believe." Mark 5:35-36*

One of the best experiences is living in a neighborhood where there are lots of other kids to play with. At age eleven, our family moved to Thornton, a suburb of Denver. It was a nice middle-class community filled with kids. On top of the fact that there was always someone to play with was the added bonus that the Lily boys, who lived two doors down, were avid baseball fans.

It is impossible to calculate the number of hours we spent playing imaginary games of wiffle ball and home run derby. The best arrangement was to make our front sidewalk home plate and the home run marker was the big elm tree in the Carabello's front yard. If you made solid contact with the plastic ball, it could be lifted over the top branches for a score.

There was an added mystique about the Carabello house. It was the residence of the neighborhood hero, Bob Carabello. He was only a few years older than the other kids but he was a regular on the high school baseball team. That automatically qualified him as someone special.

It was an exciting day when Bob qualified for his driver's license. Shortly afterwards he got his first car, a Chevrolet Corvair (notice I said Corvair, not a Corvette). As I recall, the Corvair was a box shaped car that looked like it had a tumor growing in the middle. The engine was in the back which automatically qualified it as a novelty. In spite of the unpalatable nature of the vehicle, at least it was a car, so we were all envious.

Occasionally, Bob would honor our little contests by joining us for a few innings. It was a good opportunity for him to show off his baseball skills and impress the neighborhood. I don't know for sure, but I think my older sister could have been interested in Bob but they never seemed to get together.

During the winter months, our attention usually turned from baseball to the more rugged game of football. We were all naturally Bronco fans and once in a while one of us would be fortunate enough to attend a game. It has always been very difficult to get tickets to watch the Broncos. Win or lose, Denver fans are tenacious.

Bob and one of his friends happened upon some tickets to a game. They were not the best seats but at least they were tickets. They were located in the north end zone which is the enclosed portion of Mile High Stadium. We all knew the proximity of the seats so we watched every shot of the end zone as we tried to spot Bob on television. We never did see him but when he got home after the game he had a great story and an even great trophy.

Late in the game, the Broncos lined up to kick a field goal. It was significant because their kicker, Jim Turner, was trying to make his fifth of the game, a new record. This was in the days before they hoisted the nets to keep the ball from going into the stands. As Turner lined up to make the kick, Bob and everyone else in the north end zone stands tried to position themselves to catch the ball.

The kick was made and the ball sailed through the goal posts toward the cheap seats. Amazingly, the football headed directly toward Bob. Using all the skill of a high school athlete, Bob made a great catch, in spite of dozens of waving hands and arms.

As soon as he cradled the ball in his arms, Bob fell to the concrete floor in order to protect his new prize. It must have felt like hundreds of people piled on top, scratching and clawing, in an attempt to wrestle the ball from his grasp. Bob's friend and the ushers were finally able to pull everyone from the pile and allow Bob to stand up and wave the ball triumphantly in the air.

Later that night as he told his story, all the neighborhood kids listened in awe. We took turns examining the football that had actually been used in a pro football game. We even studied the scratch marks on Bob's arms, left by the other fans who were anxious to take away his prize.

For us kids, that football was the greatest prize that anyone could imagine. It would have been a terrible tragedy if others had been able to take it away from Bob. It is not always easy to hold on to the important things of life. Sometimes it takes all the effort we can muster, but it is always worth the cost.