

TIMELINE (#13B) SUMMER FUN WITH BOBBY GORDYNEC

Editor's Note:

1. After I prepared the original draft of this Timeline, I submitted it to Bob Gordynec (who was living in Gladwin, Michigan). His April, 2013, remembrances of the summers of 1947 - 1951 are incorporated in the following account.
2. The 3 photographs in this Timeline were taken on July 13, 1949 in the side yard of the Gordynec home on Statler Blvd., St Clair Shores, Michigan. Bobby's half-size basketball court is hidden in the background by the many tall bushes and flowers. At the time, Uncle Victor was 49 years old; Aunt Mary was 40; Bobby Gordynec was 16; I was 13, and Bobby DeMonaco was 12.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Josephine (Hechlik) Boyer and Mary (Hechlik) Gordynec were sisters. I am the only child of Josephine and John Boyer.

Bobby is the only child of Mary and Victor Gordynec. Bobby is 3 years and 1 month older than I.

2. While both families lived in or near Detroit, Michigan, we were together often. My Cousin Bobby Gordynec was my closest relative and best friend.

3. In February of 1947, when I was 11 years old, my family moved from Detroit to Greenbush (200 miles north).

4. At the beginning of each of the 5 summers from 1947 through 1951, I lived with the Gordynec family for about 3 weeks. The first 4 summers were spent in St. Clair Shores (just northeast of Detroit), and the final summer (after they moved) was spent in New Baltimore (farther northeast of Detroit).

5. The Gordynecs took care of me as if I were a member of their own family. I couldn't have been treated any better. Bobby and I were like the brothers each of us wanted but never had. We spent almost every waking hour together enjoying a very happy and carefree existence.



Mary, Bobby, and Victor Gordynec. At the Gordynec home. July 13, 1949

SPORTS

Most of our activities centered around sports, primarily baseball. Both of us liked sports better than anything else. Besides being my best friend, Bobby was my baseball coach and mentor. Almost everything I ever knew about baseball, I learned from him. He was a very good and enthusiastic baseball player who came close to being selected to a major league team. We often attended and cheered on the Detroit Tigers at Briggs Stadium.

We went to some ball field almost every day, usually the Lutheran Church field, to practice and have fun. We were often joined by Bobby's ("Big Bob") neighbor, Bobby DeMonaco ("Little Bob") who was a year younger than I. We took turns batting and pitching to each other, with Big Bob doing most of the pitching. During batting practice the balls were sprayed all over the field and we had to retrieve them after running out of balls. We practiced playing the infield and the outfield. Big Bob would hit the balls, and Little Bob and I would field the grounders or fly balls or chase after them. When we didn't go to a ball field, we used the wide parkway in front of Bobby's house, played 'catch' and hit flies and grounders at each other. It was great fun, even shagging the balls.

During these 5 summers, Bobby played on 3 different youth baseball teams. His teams played on many different fields, including Veteran's Park in Hamtramck. On the Hamtramck American Legion team, he played shortstop and Teddy Kazanski played second or third base. (A few years later, Kazanski was drafted by the National League Philadelphia Phillies and paid a huge signing bonus.)

Bobby's parents and I attended every one of his games to cheer him on. I appointed myself as his team's batboy and was their loudest "shouter." I recorded all of Bobby's batting statistics and calculated his batting average. Many times, Aunt Mary would prepare picnic lunches and treat us to ice cream cones.

Big Bob, Little Bob and I, joined by several friends, played basketball on the almost half-sized court (30 ft x 40 ft) in Bobby's backyard. Of course, Bobby had a tremendous height advantage over us since he was at least 3 years older and stood 6 feet, 2 inches tall.

Several times, Bobby and I played golf at a course located more than a mile from his house. We got there by him carrying me and his golf clubs on his bicycle, an amazing balancing act. Since we had only 1 set of clubs and didn't want to pay 2 green fees, I went disguised as his caddy. When we were out of sight of the clubhouse, I revealed my true identity as a golfer. I used his clubs and played nearly a full round of golf. Once I even beat him by a stroke or two!



Cousins Bobby and Tommy. At the Gordynec home. July 13, 1949.



Little Bob DeMonaco, Big Bob Gordynec, and Tom Boyer. At the Gordynec home. July 13, 1969.

MINIATURE SPORTS

We played various miniature sports games. One game was, of course, a baseball board game. Many real life baseball players were each represented by an individual circular card. The sizes of the various arcs on the card reflected that player's lifetime batting skills (percentage of various hits, outs, walks, etc). A spinning arrow indicated his current at-bat result. We would each select a 9-man team, play a 9-inning game, and keep score. The winner was the team with the most runs, and I was able to win some of these games.

Bobby was ingenious at creating and building miniature sports games:

1. He built a miniature, to-scale, baseball park about 6 feet square behind his house. It replicated a baseball park, complete with an infield, pitcher's mound, dugouts, scoreboard, and flagpole. The batter and bat, carved from wood, was operated by spinning him on a vertical axis. The baseball, a marble, was delivered to the batter by a chute from the pitcher's box. A fastball, curve, or change-up could be "thrown." I have seen the ball travel 30 feet out of the park with an excellent batter connection. We kept score on scorecards. The winner was the person with the most runs after 9 innings, just like in real life. Bobby almost always won this game.
2. He invented a basketball game that we played in his basement. The player, carved from wood, took hook shots using a large marble for a basketball. There were 30 positions on the court and, taking turns, the first person to make a basket from each position was the winner. It usually took about 125 shots per player to complete a game. However, Bobby once finished the game in only 64 shots, a world's record.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

We participated in many other fun activities that were not sports-related. We went to numerous double-feature movies, driven there by Uncle Victor and later by Bobby after he got his own car. We went to Jefferson Beach, an amusement park. There we challenged a giant slide, a large rotating barrel, a big floor spinning wheel, and a mirrored glass room. We also played card games, particularly pinochle, with his parents and visited our few remaining relatives in Detroit. We played darts in the basement and talked to each other, tree-to-tree, using 2 tin cans and a taut string.

In the later years, we watched television and were thrilled by professional wrestling, roller derby games, and baseball in glorious black and white colors. To top things off, we had lots of fun things to eat such as hot dogs, watermelon, cake, vanilla ice cream topped with Hershey's chocolate syrup and Vernor's ginger ale. Of course, Aunt Mary prepared substantial Polish and American meals and was an especially good baker.

These 5 summers were wonderful and unforgettable times. It was always difficult for me to pack up and return to my real home in Greenbush.

Editor's Note:

Vernor's was an extremely popular drink at that time. It is a ginger-flavored soft drink and the oldest surviving ginger ale brand in the United States. It was created in 1880 by James Vernor, a Detroit pharmacist. In comparison, the carbonated soft drink Coca-Cola was introduced (as a patent medicine) in 1886 by John Pemberton, a pharmacist from Atlanta, Georgia.