



We've lost so much this year – mostly, we hope, things that will come back soon, like live music, evenings with friends and sports we can watch in person. Thousands have lost loved ones. Less shockingly, we have also seen the deaths of some old men who lived full lives. Like the many baseball greats whose obits we've read this year.

In the past few weeks we've said goodbye to Joe Morgan, Whitey Ford, Ron Perranowski, Sweet Lou Johnson and earlier this year, Don Larsen – who pitched the only perfect game in World Series history. Johnson and Perranowski probably aren't familiar names unless you're a baseball nut of a certain age...or a Dodger fan. I am both, and I have a ball autographed by Sweet Lou on the mantle. (He hit the home run that won Game Seven of the 1965 World Series.)

Sports, of course, engender deep loyalty, often fanatical devotion. Ask any Cubs fan.

Which brings me to the point: about an experience I had several years ago at Wrigley Field. I've told this story before, so if you've heard it, you're excused.

Until COVID, I met up with two lifelong friends every year at a baseball game in May, the birthday month for all three of us. Visiting Wrigley a few years ago, as our tickets were being scanned, my friend mentioned that it was our birthdays. The ticket taker, Mary, shouted to other nearby employees, who all sang Happy Birthday. By the way, you know you're in the Midwest when stuff like that happens.

Then in the fifth inning a Guest Relations associate came over to our seats and identified us as the birthday boys. She invited us onto the field after the game to have our photo taken in front of the Cubs dugout, which we gladly accepted.

The Cubs' technology enabled the ticket taker to enter this data point on her tablet that allowed the other associate to deliver this perk. If they had given us free food, beer and swag, we'd have forgotten it the next day. But this experience – which cost

them nothing – is something we'll never forget.

Every organization is unique, and every marketer can create some kind of relationship-building experience that will be far more impactful than discounts or merchandise – and far less expensive, too.

Your thoughts?

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