

GOD IN THE BULLPEN

The Randy Lerch Story

*A Big Leaguer's battle with drug
and alcohol addiction and cirrhosis*

NEW!!!

READ SAMPLE CHAPTER

RANDY LERCH
WITH HAROLD A. LERCH

GOD IN THE BULLPEN

The Randy Lerch Story

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The Reading Fightin Phils

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Hal collects player-signed trading cards on eBay. Many used in the book are from his collection.

Author

The author, Randy Lerch, is a former Major League baseball player and spent eleven years in the Big Leagues. After baseball, Randy managed a family-owned restaurant and later was an administrator in the field of underground utility construction. He and his wife, Maria, live in the Sierra Mountains east of his birthplace of Sacramento. They are blessed with two grown children and four wonderful grandchildren.

Co-Author

Harold A. “Hal” Lerch, Sr. is an author, retired professional engineer, and founder of Word to the World Ministries, a resource offering witnessing material at no cost. Hal and his wife Jeanne live in Pennsylvania with their two children and grandchildren.

Mission Statement

The author is concerned about the fate of others, both from substance addiction and their relationship with God. In this book he shares his experiences of what addiction to illegal substances and alcohol can do to a person: they can break up a family, end a promising career, and even end a life.

But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.” Matthew 19:26

Dedication

I dedicate this book to my wife, Maria, and to my parents, the late Robert Louis and Barbara Jean (Tillett) Lerch.

I also dedicate this book to my daughter and son, Kristy and Randy, Jr., and to my grandchildren Andrew, Tyler, Mariah, and Colby.

In loving memory of Abuela Juanita

An old man's grandchildren are his crowning glory. A child's glory is his father. (Proverbs 17:6).

Acknowledgments

- Jesus Christ, our LORD, Savior, and Creator.
- Thank you, Maria for the prayers, moral support, and energy you gave your husband while he was writing this book.
- I would like to thank my brother in Christ Harold “Hal” Lerch Sr. for writing this book with me. Hal gave me the idea and encouraged me to put my life's journey on paper. Without his knowledge and expertise this book would not have been possible.

To Tug McGraw, who came “from the bullpen” many times, both on the field (literally) and off.

O Give thanks unto the LORD; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works. (Psalms 105:1-2).

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Foreword

If you were a Philadelphia Phillies fan in the 1950's, 60's, and 70's, you knew who Randy Lerch was. In 1950 the "Whiz Kids" won the pennant. That was the first Phillies pennant in 35 years. The World Series outcome was a disappointing four-game sweep by the Yankees.

In 1964, led by guys like Johnny Callison, Tony Taylor, and Richie (Dick) Allen, the Phillies had all but clinched the National League pennant. The season lasted about two weeks too long: they finished second after an infamous losing streak.

In the late 70's, the Phillies were again competitive. Annually, they came Close but no cigar." In 1978 they were battling for the division but were unable to clinch. As the fans wondered if this would slip from their grasps *a la* 1964, a 23-year-old pitcher got them a win with his arm and, if that were not enough, hit two home runs. Randy Lerch beat the in-state rival Pittsburgh Pirates.

A few years later, the same pitcher brought joy to "Cream City." Randy started the franchise's first ever playoff game win, beating THE YANKEES in Yankee Stadium.

This player was 6'-5", a natural athlete, ran like a deer, threw the ball hard, and could swing for the fences. One might ask why Randy Lerch is not in the Hall of Fame. He will tell you why in this book: a little green pill.

Randy Lerch wants to warn you to avoid this pitfall and how to do it: faith in God. The side benefit to that is awesome – eternal life!

Hal Lerch

Introduction

Two “clans” of Lerches left the Frankfurt area of the state of Hesse in the German Palatinate. They landed in Philadelphia aboard the Queen Elizabeth on September 16, 1738. One clan relocated to the Allentown, Pennsylvania, region and the other to Reading, Pa. Two centuries later, Randy’s ancestors left the Reading area and moved to the West Coast. My family from the Allentown branch remained in Pennsylvania.

Just over a century after the California Gold Rush of 1849 started at Sutter’s Mill, Randy was born in Sacramento on lands originally owned by Sutter. I was born in Pennsylvania four years earlier. Randy and I grew up with the same interests: baseball, hunting, and fishing. Both of us were learning about the LORD. Although neither knew the other existed, both wanted to be Big League ballplayers when we grew up.

Professional baseball became a reality for Randy. When he came up as a rookie with my favorite team, the Phillies, I was awestruck. “Huh? A Lerch? In the Majors?” I did not know if we were related, but I had a new favorite player! Lerch is a rare name, meaning “lark” in German.

Once, I sent Randy fan mail to tell him we were coming to a game and would like to meet him. Before the game, Randy purposefully neared our section of seats holding a baseball in the air. I elbowed Dad and said, “Hey, there’s Randy Lerch!” A minute later I realized, “Hey, he’s there because of the letter I sent him!” The railings between seating sections at Veteran’s Stadium prevented me from getting down to field level, a big disappointment.

One-third century later, we both were winding down our careers in industrial/commercial construction management. (Why would we not have the same careers at that time? If I were not four years older and eight inches shorter, we could be twins.) I took up the hobby of genealogy. One of the first projects was to digitize a Lerch Family History book published in 1942 by a group called The Lerch Reunion. I got inspired to try to find my old baseball hero and email him an electronic copy.

That book was written using hundred-years-ago language that is difficult to understand. Randy could not find his family because when his great grandfather left Pennsylvania, the Lerch Reunion lost track of him. I volunteered to help Randy, and we were able to identify his lineage using that source and an on-line ancestry website.

We maintained interest in the on-line research and tracked down maternal and paternal ancestors for both Randy and me. We descend from Charlemagne and many other European “top draft picks.” On Randy’s mother’s side, he descends from two Mayflower families. I am proud to claim Martin Luther on my father’s mother’s side.

We remained in touch by email during this research. For Christmas a few years ago, Randy sent me a signed baseball. I had never touched an official MLB ball before that. There was just enough time before Christmas to reciprocate by sending Randy one of my books. (I had written several Christian books in the early 2000’s.) Randy called me on Christmas day. That is when I learned of his strong faith. That night, I came up with a grand scheme to write Randy’s life story, and even thought of the title that we are in-fact using.

Randy and Maria had Jeanne and I come out for a week the following autumn. It was great to visit places that we had only read about or seen on television and movies: Sutter’s Mill, Placerville, Lake Tahoe, Donner Pass, etc. The best part of the visit was when the four of us sat around and chatted. Sometimes it was just Randy and me out back at the grill. I had to beg him to “ruin” my steak by burning it: I understand that carbon is good for your digestive system. We spoke a lot about the LORD and our faith. Also, I brought up the “biography” subject, but it was not a priority at that time due to other factors.

Another top-notch time was when Maria brought out all of Randy’s sports memorabilia. I had hours of fun going through it. I finally “got to be a Big Leaguer” in my little fantasy world as I examined all the stories, awards, bats, balls, uniforms, etc.

It was obvious that Randy was not feeling well. Despite that, he was a wonderful host. He was concerned about his abdomen growing and he could not control it. He was doing sit-ups and dieting to try to get back to his normal, which was lean and strong. He could barely walk! At one point in our discussion, Randy's eyes welled up and he said, "I don't want to leave Maria alone."

Randy called us a few weeks later to tell us he had cirrhosis. At least, now he knew what he had to fight: it was no longer an invisible enemy. If you have children with great promise, you push them even harder to do what they should do. God does the same:

My son, don't be angry when the LORD punishes you. Don't be discouraged when he has to show you where you are wrong. For when he punishes you, it proves that he loves you. When he whips you, it proves you are really his child. Let God train you, for he is doing what any loving father does for his children. Hebrews 12:5b-7a LVB.

Randy has a remarkable story to tell. God pushed him harder and harder until he told it. "Performance" drugs. Alcoholism. A highly publicized drug trial! Cut from the World Series team! Twice! Lost his family. Lost his money. Near-fatal crash. Near-fatal dog mauling. Cirrhosis!

Randy finally decided it was time to author the book. He sent his exceptional stories to me and I added punctuation in the right place (I hope). An amazing side story is that Randy motivated me to resume my own ministry. I had written four books years ago, but in 2018 was led to do more: I wrote a children's book about Jesus, a teen adventure, two Bible study/commentaries, and three apologetics/Christian-living titles. On top of that, many titles have been translated into other languages and are being read around the world.

Randy is now spreading his testimony. My "brother" is ultimately a winner, bound for Heaven. When this pitcher got in trouble, God came from the bullpen for the save!

Hal Lerch

Chapter One: How to Kill a Rally

Good pitching will always stop good hitting and vice-versa. Casey Stengel

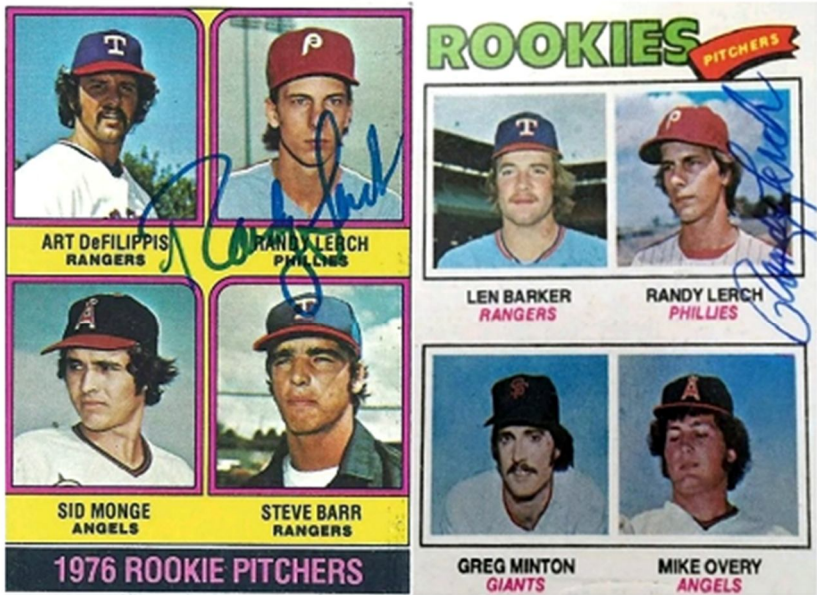
Some say that the most challenging task in all major league sports is hitting a baseball thrown by a major league pitcher. A pitcher might say the hardest thing to do is to throw a fastball past a major league hitter. I had the good fortune of being decent at both. I loved to hit! I really did not want to be a pitcher, but because I was left-handed and could throw the ball 95 miles per hour, that is where they kept playing me. Still, I did a fair amount of pinch-hitting in both the majors and minors.

I was always ahead of the age curve in the minor leagues, ranging from two to four years younger than the average. In 1975 and 1976, the Phillies called me up in September to gain experience and learn from the veterans. At ages 18 and 19, I spent one year each in Rookie-A and Full-A leagues. At age 20 I made Double-A, and Triple-A at age 21. I was on the fast track to becoming a noticeably young rookie in MLB. In fact, I made the Phillies 25-man roster in 1977 at age 22.

WELCOME TO THE BIG LEAGUES, ROOKIE

My rookie season, I came out of the blocks at full speed. After starting out with four wins and two losses, I got my first start against the Dodgers during a nine-game home stand. Their great lineup included Dusty Baker, Steve Garvey, Reggie Smith, Ron Cey, and Rick Monday. Every hitter in that lineup was a tough out. The Dodgers were off to a great start that year and I would have to pitch a great game if I was going to beat them. I did just that and beat them for my fifth win. To top it off, it was against Tommy John!

The team headed for Houston where I got my first start in the Astrodome. *What a great atmosphere! WOW! I am going to pitch in the Astrodome! Some people call it the "8th Wonder of the World!"*



Rookie Cards (Topps® Used by permission)

When the team bus pulled up and I saw it for the first time, I was in awe. I had only seen pictures of it and it was nothing like I imagined. It looked like a Flying Saucer from an old sci-fi movie, or in my day, the spaceship on the TV show *Lost in Space*. On the day I started I was terribly nervous as usual, but that was a good thing for me. I found that I needed those nerves to help me compete, though I hated that feeling. I cannot remember the Houston pitcher that I was pitching against that night, but the Astros had a great pitching staff: names like Nolan Ryan, JR Richard, Joe Niekro, and Joaquin Andujar.

The day before the Astros game that I was going to pitch, an accomplished veteran pitcher (not Tug) on our team called me to his room. He told me that I would never be a successful major league pitcher unless I took pills like the ones that were in his hand. He gave me some and I took one the night before I pitched in “the Dome.” I looked up to successful veterans, so I thought that is what I needed to do to be just as good as him. *This decision changed my career and my life forever!*

HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM

Walking to the Houston mound that day, I remember that the place looked huge and almost overwhelming. I had never been inside an indoor baseball stadium before and I do not know how many existed. The Houston fans called it “Caesar’s Palace” in honor of César Cedeño, the super-star center fielder who made many spectacular, game-saving catches there.

I remember that I did not have my usual overwhelming nervousness because of the Greenie that I took. I loved that new feeling because it made me feel like a mountain man. I felt so overwhelmingly powerful that I did not need to pitch anymore, just throw it as hard as I could down the middle, and that would overpower them. Little did I know that the feeling of invincibility offset my natural ability.

I started that game feeling great. Unfortunately, I gave up a home run and had to endure the festivities. The Astros had a homerun celebration that no opponent ever enjoyed. While a big bull snorted, steers would storm across the big scoreboard with cowboys trying to rope them. Meanwhile, “Deep in the Heart of Texas” played loudly over the PA system. I am not sure how long this took, but it felt like something between five minutes and forever.



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We finally got back to baseball. I threw one more pitch and “POW,” another homerun! I was not feeling too good about baseball at that moment. Back to baseball, one more pitch, and “BAM!” Three pitches! Three homeruns! Three Rodeos! Three rounds of Deep in the Heart of Texas! Now my record was five

and three. Yogi Berra has a quote for a time like this: “You wouldn’t have won if we’d beaten you.”

As bad as this day was, it was worse than I knew. *This game was at the beginning of a situation that was going to change the rest of my career. I had just made the worst decision of my life!*

After the game that night, I was terribly upset at my performance, but mostly upset because I had taken the drug. I was still so wired from the effects of the Greenie I took that I just laid in my hotel room and stared at the ceiling. That did not stop me from taking my Greenie again before my next start because I liked that feeling of invincibility- and no nerves! This time I learned what they called “drinking your Greenie down.” I went to the bar at a nightclub and got so drunk and tired that I could sleep. As time went on, I stayed there until closing time, 2 or 3 in the morning.

Addiction became my worst enemy. As it turns out, the Dodger win was the last start of my eleven-year career that I pitched without greenies. The Houston game began a run of ten no decisions in a row. That time of my career was one of the most torturous of my career and life. My emotions throughout this stretch were all over the place. If I pitched well enough to win, it seemed we would not score any runs. Then, if I pitched badly, we would score enough runs that I, at least, did not get the loss. I did not get another decision until early July, when I beat the Cardinals for my sixth win.

EVERYBODY DOES IT, RIGHT?

That new habit continued for the remainder of my career. For every start during the remainder of my career, the “standard procedure” was:

1. Take your Greenie before the game.
2. Get drunk after the game.
3. After a good game you went out and celebrated by getting drunk.
4. After a bad game, you went out and drowned your sorrows.

Note: The stimulant properties of amphetamines can mask the intoxication from alcohol. Conversely, the depressant effects of alcohol can blunt the stimulant effects of amphetamine. As a result, when [alcohol and amphetamines] are consumed in combination, users can end up using dangerous, toxic levels of both.¹

Looking back, I realize that the drugs and alcohol were distorting my decisions terribly. This was one of the reasons, among others, that I kept taking them.

I ended up the season with a 10 and 6 rookie record. We won the National League East and went to the playoffs. I was able to experience what it felt like to be a part of a major league winning team. I remember watching championship series on television when I was a boy: seeing the players run out on the field to celebrate after the last out of the game. Experiencing the champagne parties inside the clubhouse was the pinnacle of fun. We were celebrating as the players who battled the league ever since spring training.

¹ Web: <https://drugabuse.com/library/concurrent-alcohol-and-amphetamine-abuse/>

BACK COVER

God in the Bullpen! How else would one describe the One who rescued a major league pitcher?

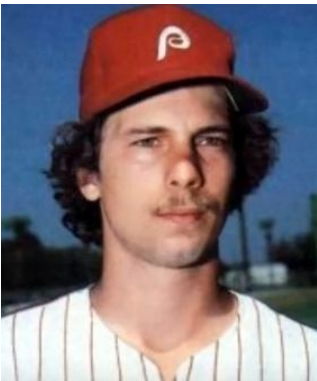
Many professional athletes have experimented with drugs. When I was a rookie and told by a respected veteran that I would never make it in the major leagues without amphetamines, I trusted him and took them. They gave me a feeling of invincibility, but they hurt my performance.

Soon, the “greenies” became a habit, and eventually I washed them down with alcohol. Of course, that became a habit, too.

Eventually, addiction led to a failed stint in a rehabilitation center. After rehab, an automobile accident while driving impaired nearly took my life. This was the lowest point of my life.

That is when the ultimate relief pitcher, God, came from the bullpen and saved the game, my life. I was later diagnosed with cirrhosis. My liver was incurably damaged by the alcohol. With His help, I am battling this, but only God can know how much time I have left.

I want to tell my story to help others avoid the pitfalls that brought me to a time of despair. I also want to tell you that the LORD can help you if you will give your life to Him: and, He will give you eternal life in Heaven.



Randy Lerch is a former professional baseball pitcher who played in the major leagues for the Philadelphia Phillies, Montreal Expos, Milwaukee Brewers, and San Francisco Giants from 1975 to 1986. He is most famously remembered for pitching plus hitting two home runs in a win that clinched the National League East Division championship for the Phillies. Randy also was the starting pitcher in the Brewers first-ever playoff victory. In addition to sharing his faith in God, he tells many great baseball stories in this book.