

## A baseball story for Rosh Hashana

It was nighttime at the Feldman residence as Brian and Suzanne snuggled up beside their son Cole to read him a bedtime story. A unique situation as Brian didn't usually get home in time to help get his kids to sleep with the crazy hours he worked at his start-up menswear company. He was thrilled that at least tonight he was home to say good night. But just as he was about to open one of Cole's favourite books (name of book?) Brian's cellphone rang. He looked at the display. "I have to take this call. Keep quiet everyone, it's Mr Sharp."

"Mr. Sharp, now?" asked Suzanne.

But Brian had already pushed the talk button. "Hi, Mr. Sharp, said Brian, "no of course it's not too late to talk. Yes I'm alone" he said as he elbowed Cole in the face and rolled over Suzanne off the bed, ignoring their screams of pain, and dashed off towards his office in the basement.

"Who's Mr Sharp" asked Cole.

"He's a very important client", replied Suzanne. "Dad's been waiting for months to talk to him. This might take a while. Go to sleep and dad will come in later to kiss you good night."

"But he promised we'd talk about baseball tonight."

"I know. Don't worry," said Suzanne as she kissed her son goodnight and left.

When Brian finally got off the phone he was all excited.

"Finally. The phone call I've been waiting for, and guess what, he wants to meet me face to face next weekend. I'm flying to Chicago. This could be it."

"But Brian, you promised to be with Cole next weekend, and play some ball and spend time with him. The summer is almost over, Rosh Hashana coming and you never see him".

"Look", said Brian, "if I don't build this company, what's going to happen. No house, no food, no more baseball. I'm doing everything I can."

"I know Brian, but..."

"Wait a second", said Brian. "How about I take Cole along to Chicago. Aren't the Jays playing in town that weekend. Hey, why not the whole team. We could use a road trip, all the boys, their dads, Chicago, how amazing would that be."

The more Brian thought about it the more he knew it would work. Go to Chicago, meet Sharp, head of the largest hotel chain in North America, and talk him into putting his company, "Stylin' with Brian", in the lobby of every hotel he owns. That would be the breakthrough he was looking for. That would be the one that put his company on the map. Then he could finally relax a little and spend more time with his family. Bringing along the whole team would be perfect. He could spend time with his son and while he met Mr. Sharp one night, Cole could stay with the other kids and have a blast. The perfect plan.

The next morning he cleared it with Coach Dan, found plenty of tickets for the Chicago vs. Toronto baseball game and reserved 12 hotel rooms and 12 flights for the team. A week later they were packed and ready to go.

"Dad, I am so excited" said Cole "tell me about what we're doing each day."

"Okay", replied Brian, "so we're staying right downtown at the Swiss hotel, minutes from the waterfront, near the ferris wheel and grant park....."

And they spent the whole evening talking.

On Friday morning the team met at the airport. Everyone was so excited, all wearing their blue Jays baseball gear. Most of the boys had never been to Chicago, some had never been on an airplane before. They boarded the

flight as a group. As Brian entered the plane with Cole, they looked at the first class passengers and saw a familiar face.

“Brian, what are you doing here?”, asked Brian’s business partner, Kevin. Brian did his best to look surprised.

“Wow, what a co-incidence”, said Brian. “What are you doing on this flight, Kevin?”

Kevin played along perfectly, “I’m headed to Chicago for a relaxing weekend” he said, giving Brian a wink.

Brian looked at his son. “ See, Cole, everyone loves Chicago. Why don’t you go on back and sit with the rest of the boys, I want to chat a little bit with Kevin here.”

“Okay dad, no problem”. Cole was a little disappointed but he ran back and found a seat amongst his friends. He figured his dad would be come back eventually and besides they had the whole weekend together.

Brian settled in next to Kevin and within minutes they were busily organizing the business meetings and plans for meeting with Mr. Sharp.

When the plane landed Brian quickly jumped up and went back to where the rest of the boys were.

“Where were you this whole time?”, coach Dan said indignantly.

“Oh”, said Brian nonchalantly, “I just saw a friend up there in first class and we chatted for a bit, no big deal”.

The team exited the plane, went to the baggage carousel and got their bags. Coach Dan bought everyone tokens for the subway. Each kid grabbed a bag and went outside. Suddenly Kevin called out.

“Hey Brian, I’ve got some room in my limo. Not for the whole team, but I have two spaces. How about it”.

“ Cole, how about travelling downtown in style,” said Brian.

“Okay dad”, he replied as he glanced back at his jealous teammates. He wanted to be with them but he also wanted to be with his dad, and the limo did look cool. “See you at the hotel later, guys,” said Cole as he ran after his dad.

Cole grabbed his dad’s hand as a porter grabbed their bags. The porter put them on his trolley and went out the front door to the waiting stretch hummer limo. Cole jumped in excited for the ride. Inside were a bunch of men and women in suits, all from his dad’s company.

“Hi Cole” they said.

“Hi”, said Cole, as he stepped in. “so you’re here in Chicago too.”

“Must be another coincidence”, said Brian cheerfully.

Cole took a seat beside the driver as the car headed towards the downtown core. Brian sat in the back and was immediately engrossed in conversation with the rest of the suits. With their laptops pulled out they all started working. Oh well, thought Cole, at least I’m in the same car as Dad. So what if he wants to chat with some people.

The driver looked over at him. “First time in Chicago, son?”, asked the driver.

“Yes”, said Cole, “we’re with our whole team and going to see the Jays play the white sox”.

“Sounds like fun. My name’s Lewis. What’s with your dad back there”.

“Oh some sort of meeting, but as soon as we get to the hotel it’ll be fine”.

“I’m sure Brian will find more time to spend with you, ” replied the driver.

How did he know my dad’s name, thought Cole.

“ I sure hope so. Anyway, tell me more about Chicago.”

“ See that tall building, it’s the Willis tower”

The driver told such a spellbinding story about Chicago that Cole barely noticed the drive at all until they were at the hotel. The whole team met together, walked in downtown Chicago, did some shopping and had some famous Chicago Deep dish pizza.

The next morning the team gathered in the lobby and headed out to the game. Everyone had their hats and gloves and Jays gear ready to go.

On a busy downtown street, crowded with tons of tourists, they waited for the light to change when they suddenly heard a loud voice powered by a megaphone scream out at them.

“Repent now”, said the voice threateningly, “or your days are numbered”.

The kids saw a tall preacher standing on a box, a bible in his hand, gazing back at them, shouting, “Dear God, you who loves all who love you, teach us the humility to perceive our own faults. Grant us the wisdom to be forgiving of others”.

Some of the boys started laughing, others just wanted to get away from the preacher man.

But Cole just stared. “Hey”, he asked, “aren’t you Lewis from the limo?”

The preacher replied, “See here, this is Cole with his father Brian.”

By now the entire team had stopped laughing and was listening in amazement to the preacher as an even larger crowd gathered around.

“God is waiting for you, Brian, have courage to be your highest self. Have patience not to be discouraged”

How does this guy know my name, Brian thought.

“Beware the sharp tongues of your rivals”, the preacher continued, “hope will overcome your fears of the future.”

Did he just say Sharp. Brian looked at Cole. “Did you tell this guy something?”.

“No, dad, honest.”

Brian yelled back, “Did you just say Sharp?”

The preacher ignored him. “The Jays might take flight but they can’t avoid the sharp knives of repentance”

“Oh, he just sees our blue Jays shirt”, one fathers joked.

“I see all”, said the preacher, ignoring the comment “yes its time to focus on what is in front of you, not always striving for the next big deal. Change your ways and let God in and bigger prizes will be yours.”

Brian was mesmerized by the preacher. How did he know all this, wondered Brian.

“Come on dad”, said Cole, “let’s go. The game, remember?”

“Right”, said Brian. The preacher suddenly reached out and pressed a white pamphlet into Cole’s hand.

“Remember the words spoken today,” he thundered.

Cole quickly put the pamphlet in his pocket as he and his father hurried after the rest of the team.

When the boys got to the game they found their seats, looked out at the beautiful grass, the warm sun and their boys in blue ready to play ball. Brian sat back. He was with his son and his friends. What could be better. Time to just enjoy the game. After a few innings, he looked at his phone and noticed he had texts from his partner, Kevin. “Are you still at the game? Meet me at the hot dog stand. Need to talk”.

Brian got up and announced, “Boys I’m going to the snack bar, be right back”. Cole nodded, engrossed in the game. Brian went up to the concessions stands and found Kevin. Sure enough, as Brian had planned, the men and women from the office were all there. They found a shady spot under the grandstand and went through the company plan on how to lure Mr. Sharp and get their menswear into his hotels. Brian completely lost track of time, innings went by and finally he looked at his watch.

Oh my god, I got to get back to the boys. He left the meeting and sprinted back to his seats just as the 9<sup>th</sup> inning began.

“Boy,” said Brian, “it sure is hard finding a hot dog around here. I must have walked around 6 times trying to find one,” he joked.

Just as he was about to sit down, a vendor walked past him with a large tray of food, “Hot dogs, hot dogs, only \$4”.

Brian turned red as the rest of the boys laughed. Meanwhile the game was very close. Cheers and jeers rang back and forth as the Jays mounted a comeback and went ahead by a run in the top of the 9<sup>th</sup>. The boys cheered themselves hoarse as the White Sox came up in the bottom of the inning. The Sox tried hard but Roberto Osuna shut the door and closed out the game with a save. The boys cheered as the rest of the crowd went silent.

After the game, everyone went their own way, the plan being to meet up later for dinner at the hotel. Brian and Cole went into some stores and then they decided to take the subway back. They were finally enjoying their time together joking and laughing and shopping. On the subway they were clearly the minority in their Jays clothes, but everyone was in good spirits.

Just at that moment a tall familiar-looking man came in and sat down across from them wearing a White Sox uniform and hat. Cole looked over at him.

“Wait a second”, Cole called out, “Weren’t you the preacher man? And the limo driver?”

“I wear different uniforms”, the man replied, “but I’m still the same guy, just a baseball fan, really. How did you and Brian enjoy the game?”

“It was great. Hey wait, how do you know our names?” said Brian.

“I know a lot of stuff. I know you two need to spend more time together”, said the preacher.

Brian and Cole looked at each other. Was this a joke? Was this guy following them? How did he know all this?

“Hey, you guys are big Jays fans. Guess what, I know where they’re staying. You want to meet Donaldson or Bautista. They’re all staying at the downtown Hilton.”

“No way”, said Brian.

“Believe what you will. In fact aren’t you going to that very hotel tonight?”

Brian could not hide the shock on his face. All day Kevin and he were planning a meeting with Mr. Sharp that night at that Hilton hotel. If Cole and his friends now wanted to come along to meet the Jays it would screw up his business plans.

The preacher man, or whoever he was, then stood up to get off at the next stop.

“Hey”, called Brian, “who are you?”

Brian and Cole looked but the man was gone, somehow swallowed up in the crowd as though he was never there.

“Dad, should we actually go and meet the Jays?”

“Well I don’t know. They need their space. Besides, are we just going to waltz into some strange hotel where they

might kick us out and we don't even know for sure they're there".

In the lobby Cole told the whole team what happened.

"Lets go", Coach Dan said, "come on, what have we go to lose. Let's go meet the Jays".

The team cheered and they all headed out the door. All Brian could do was follow.

The team excitedly walked the 10 blocks down to the Hilton hotel. As they entered the lobby, the elevator door opened and out walked Roberto Osuna! The kids yelled Osuna and excitedly went to see him. He was only too glad to meet the boys, sign autographs and pose for pictures.

It's the right hotel after all, thought Brian.

Brian was sweating. How could he meet Sharp at the bar when he had his son and the whole baseball team in tow. He had to somehow get them to leave and leave him behind, but they were just staking out the lobby hoping to see more players.

"Okay guys", said Brian, "we saw Osuna. The rest of the team must be in their rooms or at dinner, come on, lets head back to our own hotel now. I'm heading up to the bar to see if any Jays are there. If no one's there I'll come back down and we can all head back, its getting late".

But before Brian could move, one of the kids yelled, "The bar's upstairs, that's where the Jays are" and the whole team darted up the escalator.

"Noooo", yelled Brian as he ran after them.

As Brian pulled into the bar, breathless, he saw the boys and their dads gathered at a corner table...surrounding Josh Donaldson! Looking to his left Brian spotted a very large angry man in a suit standing in a corner with his arms crossed.

"Are you responsible for these boys?", the man asked Brian.

"Yes, I guess so", said Brian meekly. "They just wanted to meet their heroes, the blue Jays".

"Well this happens to be my hotel and you can take these kids right out of here immediately. There's a time and a place for everything".

"But this is the time and place, they're so excited, they just want to meet some Jays and then we'll go".

The man narrowed his eyes. "Do I know you?"

Oh no. This can't be happening.

"No. Maybe. I don't know". The gig was up.

"Ah, yes, Mr Sharp, I'm Brian. I own 'Stylin with Brian' and I had hoped to meet you this evening to discuss some business".

"Brian, let's clear something up right now".

The bar got silent as the kids gathered around, as did Donaldson and some other Jays.

"You gotta make a choice, Brian. Get rid of these kids and we can meet in my corner booth, or else.

Brian, faced with the hardest choice in his life, looked at his son's eager face and at Mr Sharp's \$2500 double-breasted suit. What to do. He looked again at Cole. Suddenly Cole pulled the preacher man flyer from his pocket and gave it to his dad. Brian read:

Teach us humility to perceive our own faults. Have courage to be your highest self. Grant us wisdom to be forgiving of others. Have patience not to be discouraged, and hope, to overcome all fears of the future"

It was signed “Lewis – the preacher man”

“Mr. Sharp”, said Brian confidently, “I would love to do business with you but right now I’m on a baseball road trip with my son, and my son is meeting Josh Donaldson and that is what I want to do as well”.

“You just made a million dollar mistake, my friend. You will never do business with my hotels ever again. Consider this meeting over. Too bad. I had high hopes for you”.

Mr Sharp turned on his heel and stormed out of the room.

Cole looked at his dad. “Sorry dad, did I screw up everything by running into the bar?”.

“No, son, I screwed up by not being here fully. Lets forget all that”.

Josh Donaldson then stuck out his hand. “Hello Brian, I’m Josh Donaldson. Your son and his teammates tell me they play a little ball.”

Brian couldn’t believe this.

Josh continued, “So what was that blowout about anyway?”.

“Well, Josh”, Brian explained, now that they were on first names, “I own a menswear company and we were trying to sell suits in these hotels. I guess now that’s not going to happen”.

“You know”, replied Josh, “I could use a new suit. Do you happen to have my size?”

Cole piped up. “If we don’t we can make one for you”. Josh laughed at the young boy’s chutzpah.

“Hey, Jose”, Josh called out to Bautista, “come over here, didn’t you say you needed a new suit. This guy makes custom fitting suits for baseball players”.

“I did?” said Bautista.

“You do now”, remarked Josh.

Then Edwin Encarnacion and Kevin pillar walked over, with Tulowitzki and Kawasaki right behind them. “Hey, we need suits too”.

Of course RA Dickey, Mark Buehrle and David Price all wanted suits too.

The weekend was a big success. The Jays won. The boys saw their heroes and got their autographs and pictures.

Back home Brian’s business was booming. After all, he now outfitted the Toronto blue Jays, and guess who was on the cover of the business section of the Toronto Star.

Over the high holydays Brian went to shul each day with his wife and kids and focused on how he could do better, to balance his life.

During services Cole, sitting between his parents, looked back and saw a familiar face in the crowd smiling and waving goodbye to him, and then the preacher stood up and left the shul.

Shana Tova