

Always Leave 'Em Laughing

You may notice his wooden leg first, but it's his face that you remember. It's a wreck, as in Veeck. Here is a man with the gift of radiant homeliness.

"How can you be a sage if you're pretty?" rumbles Bill Veeck, with a rhinocerine laugh. "You can't get your wizard papers without wrinkles."

For thirty-five years, with various hiatuses for exile or illness, Veeck has been both baseball's most intellectual sage and its most gleefully vulgar wizard.

Though he has retired now—at sixty-seven, he no longer has the health of wealth to compete as he would wish—Veeck is still looked upon by baseball people with affectionate perplexity. The game would like to trundle him off to a safe corner as a sort of gadfly Long John Silver who built exploding scoreboards and sent a midget to bat.

Veeck has always been beyond the ken of his kin. "Whatever I've said over the years," says the roistering son of Bill, Sr., the starchy president of the Cubs (1919-33), "the owners have looked at me as though I were a little boy trying to run fast so the propeller on my beanie would spin."

In a lifetime saturated with appetite and anecdote, Veeck has incorporated too many natures into one personality for most folks to grasp and reconcile. Veeck says of his lifelong friend, William Shakespeare, "He writes as though he were ten different men." We often say of others what best applies to ourselves. Veeck, too, is a man of double-digit personae.

He is a renegade who at nineteen, when his father was dying and could only keep wine in his stomach, hunted up Al Capone and made the gangster a proposition: season tickets for the finest prohibition champagne.

He is the millionaire businessman who, when he bought the Indians in 1946, did so by inventing a financial scam called a debenture-stock deal which was such a sweet loophole that the IRS fought him for eleven years—then gave up. Brilliant? Says Veeck,

perversely, "I've always been singularly disinterested in business."

He is a literateur who says of Anthony Trollope, "just a small-town Dickens"; of Herman Melville, "I liked *Omoo* and *Typee* better than *Moby Dick*"; and of Robert Frost, "He was a man who convinced others to accept his own evaluation of himself. I'll take Poe."

He is the handyman extraordinaire who, because he "loved a beautiful line in a building," studied blueprint design in night school. When an engineer ran out on a project, Veeck gathered a desperation crew and in one night directed the building of the Wrigley Field scoreboard, which still stands.

He is a student of politics and history who says that he is basically apolitical because, "I have customers and my country has a secret ballot. It's nobody's business." But he will add that he has voted for Socialist presidential candidate Norman Thomas many times. "In fact, I even kept on voting for him after he died because I'd rather vote for a dead man with class than two live bums." When Veeck got 20,000 hate letters after he signed the first black player in American League history (Larry Doby), he answered them all by hand.

He is an unabashed hedonist who, for much of his adult life, has smoked four packs of cigarettes and drunk a case of beer a day. He seems to live by Oscar Wilde's dictum: "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it."

And yet he is also the doting husband and father who is almost totally dependent for emotional solvency on his wife of thirty-one years, Mary Frances, and on his nine children from two marriages—five boys and four girls, aged eighteen to forty-four.

Perhaps most remarkably, and most revealingly, Veeck has, for more than half his life, been a sufferer of Jobian curses that would have killed other men several times over. Yet he defiantly describes himself as "a cripple, but never handicapped."

Veeck gives an impression of indomitable vigor. He swings his wooden leg from the hip so that it thuds on the floor like a man tolling on a door with a baseball bat. You might not guess that ever since a recoiling artillery piece smashed his foot and led to its amputation when he was a Marine in World War II, Veeck has soaked his stump in a warm bath each morning for two hours to be able to tolerate his artificial leg.

Veek, you see, does not like wheelchairs. Or crutches. He has always known the cost of his refusal to pamper his leg. The wear, tear, and inevitable infection from his relentlessly active life have led, over the decades, to more and more surgery and less and less leg, until now Veek's limb attaches near the groin. Beer and courage have always been his painkillers. In a sense, Veek has measured out his life by what was left of his right leg.

The hair on Veek's chest seems to be trying to climb up and out of the open-necked shirts he always wears. Even on the coldest Chicago days, he refuses, as he has all his life, to wear an overcoat or hat. He loves the feeling of zero at the bone. Yet this is a man who has a permanent case of walking pneumonia that requires periodic hospitalization to drain his lungs.

"Last September, it got so bad that I couldn't breathe. I got in a cab to the hospital and told the driver, 'Go as fast as you can.' I stuck my head out the window to force more air down my throat. Until that day, I had smoked four packs a day for fifty years. Since then, I haven't touched a cigarette. The moral is that courage is usually abject cowardice, at least in my case. You get so scared that you're going to die that you do whatever you have to do."

Veek's whole body seems hypersensitized, almost overloaded with stimuli. He seems larger than his six feet because his gestures are so expansive. His short, frizzy hair seems like a million raw nerve ends trying to make their great escape from his scalp. His fingers are always doodling, touching, examining—when they're not drumming painfully hard against the gristle of his large floppy ears, as if to awaken them.

He is deaf in his left ear—the one that gets the hardest thumping, as though being punished for malfeasance in office—and half deaf in the other. Veek long ago stopped going to movies or watching much television because it enraged and saddened him to lose track of dialogue.

Veek's laughter, his rubber-mugged smile, and his temper are all close to the surface. He's impatient, direct, uninterested in manners or small talk beyond what civility requires. Cut to the nub, or cut bait.

As suits the pattern of this man who seems to have lived out not only his own life but that of his anti-self as well, Veek has spent a huge portion of his adult life in the most silent and boring

place on earth—a bare hospital room. Hemingway by nature, Proust by necessity.

Veek has had so many major operations, including six on his "good" leg, that he has developed a unique hobby. "I count sodium pentothal shots. I'm up to thirty-two. I don't know the record. You get conditioned to it. To me, being operated on is like someone else taking a half-dozen pills. Suffering is overrated. It doesn't teach you anything."

All Veek's recoveries are the same. The prescription is rest, silence, no excitement, no people, no vices. Everything, in other words, that Veek detests. He obeys orders until he feels well enough to start killing himself again. His tombstone should read, "Cause of Death: Life."

Years ago, for instance, Veek had a chronic concussion so bad that if he started coughing he would continue uncontrollably until he blacked out. That illness almost snuffed him and forced him to retire from baseball temporarily in 1961. For many years, Veek ate hard candy constantly to suppress his cough, until the candy itself became a problem. Now, when Veek coughs once, he stops everything and pays attention to nothing else, as though an old enemy were knocking on his door. So many parts of Veek's body are trying to slip him the black spot that a lesser man could spend his whole day waiting to collapse.

Instead, Veek pulls a silly plastic gizmo out of his desk. It has three cylinders, three golf-ball-sized spheres, and a tube. "This is my lung machine. The day I couldn't breathe, I didn't have enough lung capacity to hold the balls up for one second. Now I can hold them up for seven seconds." And taking a deep breath, he does.

Perhaps no man in baseball has had his life despaired of—by others—as often as Veek. He has proved an unreliable corpse for twenty years. "Some of us are afraid that, after all the things he's survived, Bill has finally decided that he's going to die this year," says Ray Grebey, the owners' chief labor negotiator and a good friend of Veek's for thirty years. "Bill has things wrong with him that only he knows. He has a growth in his throat that he won't talk about. I think that's why he's sold his interest in the White Sox and retired as team president."

"That's wishful thinking," erupts Veek good-naturedly when

told this affectionate but sorrowful diagnosis. "Ray's a fine fellow, but he's been around those owners too long. They thought they were rid of me in 1961, too. All the owners presented me with a huge embossed, illuminated book listing all my contributions to baseball. It was the sort of ode to a widow that you send out when somebody in the front office dies. Well, nine years later, I testified in Federal Court in favor of Curt Flood and against the reserve clause. My fellow owners challenged my competence as an expert witness. So I said, 'Your Honor, may I submit this lovely book in evidence. It's a souvenir of the last time I died.'"

In other moods, Veeck can hint at darker thoughts. "There have been days when I thought, 'If lightning struck me today, I wouldn't care.' I don't believe that any man is immune to that," says Veeck.

"I remember a book by Ernest Seton Thompson, the great nature writer, called *Waab, a Bear*. It was about grizzlies. You never see their carcasses left to rot in the wild. I lived in the Southwest and it's true. When their time comes to die, they go off to places where they know they won't be found. They just disappear, start the exodus to some remote canyon. You never know what happened to them.

"I feel like Waab. The time has come to depart the premises.

"The career operators, the lifelong baseball men, are like dinosaurs. Our time is past. Calvin [Griffith] and I are the last. There won't be any more."

The Bard's Room in Comiskey Park has dark wood paneling, soft lights and walls covered with a montage of black-and-white photographs of Chicago's famous and infamous sons, like Mayor Richard Daley, Clarence Darrow, and Carl Sandburg. All this, including the steer horns on the wall, was rescued from the Sirloin Room of the Stockyards Inn when it was torn down. The Bard's Room, with its mahogany furniture, looks like an intimate, unpretentious restaurant. For the last six years, Veeck has made this combination saloon and salon his office.

To be sure, Veeck had a proper president's office. But he hated it, just as he has always hated ties, coats, and the words "sir" and "mister." Veeck gave his office a fair chance, just as he had his others during his terms with the Indians (1946-49), Browns (1951-53), and White Sox (1959-61). Then, as always, he had

the office door torn off its hinges and all locks removed. "I find the idea repugnant that I would consider doing anything in running a baseball team for which I should feel ashamed enough to lock myself behind a door."

Nevertheless, the Bard's Room beckoned. Would any other sports executive have considered setting up shop in the team's press room? Veeck loved the idea. His father, after all, had done time as a sportswriter. So he had a telephone installed at a corner table and that became his office. Now any fan who wanted to drop in off the Southside streets had a chance to tell the boss what he was doing wrong. Or they could just phone him. The number was listed.

Veeck at work is much like other men at play. A beer stands always before him. He is the center of a constant relaxed flux. Everyone talks to him—or he talks to them. A bit like Dr. Samuel Johnson, he has made a name for himself from a public life whose staple seems to be casual, vastly enjoyable conversation. In fact, looking back on a life in which he has read nearly a book a day since childhood—his father bought him fifty volumes every Christmas, then had to replenish the supply before Easter—Veeck admits there are few men he resembles more in style than Johnson.

The immodest comparison here is, of course, not of talents, but merely of traits. The similarities are interesting: physical strength matched by constant and various physical sufferings; an ugliness transformed into compelling personal presence with energy and enthusiasm; great bouts of work; a passion for collecting people and their anecdotal histories; insomnia and spectacularly irregular hours; a wanderlust love of vast cities; a devotion to words and a respect for their precise meanings; a taste for renegade friends.

Chisox Manager Tony LaRussa, a bright young Veeck favorite who may be the game's first true clubhouse lawyer, since he has passed the Florida bars, sits at the next table, jotting notes for an off-season speech that evening in Joliet. "The key word is caution, right?" says LaRussa. "Keep the old foot out of the mouth."

"Caution is always the easy way out," says Veeck, a veteran of nearly 10,000 rubber-chicken speeches in his peripatetic promoting career. "A man who is cautious never sleeps with a girl, quite. He's so timid that he never savors anything completely. Even an after-dinner speaker should be a little like a drunk on a tightrope.

It keeps everyone's attention. Don't be cautious, Tony. Just don't be injudicious. If you write out your remarks, it's an insult to an audience. It shows that your first priority is to protect yourself against them. They sense it. If you just have a few notes on a scrap of paper, you'll walk away with more friends. They'll think, 'Hey, he's honest.'

"I have never liked those who are cautious. My first wife was an equestrienne in the Ringling Brothers Circus who jumped a horse through a ring of fire sidesaddle. She also was an elephant trainer, lying under their feet. It's not true that elephants never forget. Years later, we went back to the circus and she went up to her favorite, Modock the Elephant. He swung his trunk and knocked her flat. There's a lesson in there, I suspect.

"She was a very interesting woman. The divorce was my fault. I couldn't leave baseball alone. In the end, we parted on very good terms, which, of course, is the saddest way, since it means that everything we had had slithered away and been denigrated. Politeness is the end of passion."

Veeck's unique quality, as Dr. Johnson said of Shakespeare, is that he always carries with him a vivid sense of first-hand "acquaintances with life and manners" and that "all his ideas are caught from the living world."

"I've never graduated from anywhere," says Veeck, who was "invited not to return" to several preparatory schools and whose stay at Kenyon College was shortened when, while standing in a fourth-story window with one hand grasping a beer and the other gripping the window sill, he saw a friend and, not wanting to spill the beer, waved with the free hand. Veeck fell and, luckily, was so drunk and limp that he only broke both legs. Today that same dorm room is occupied by the son of Ray Grebey. "It concerns me somewhat," says Grebey. "I'm sure it's a room with a rich tradition. I'm not sure I want my son to continue it."

Veeck's scholarship is spontaneous, voracious, and eclectic. He reads everything, especially while he is soaking his leg in the morning and when he can't sleep at night. During the past two weeks he has finished books on the Horn of Africa, thirteenth-century Manchuria, and Aztec culture, new novels by Iris Murdoch and Anthony Burgess, a history of Catherine the Great's Russia and a comparative study of Spanish-speaking countries in the

western hemisphere. "I must be terribly indiscriminating, because I find everything interesting," he says.

What we have here is a man who, when he reads an author, whether it's Mark Twain or one of his favorite detective pulp writers, doesn't buy one book but the collected works. He seldom watches TV except for news and sports. "With television, you are at the mercy of the mentality that created the program. You have lost your power of determination."

For Veeck, watching classic literature replaced by faddish film is saddening. "It isn't just the feeling for something remote, like Shakespeare's comedies, that we've lost. We're even beginning to lose the feel for the Marx Brothers.

"We're losing our natural instincts and tastes. They're either watered down or dulled by cynicism. The only way a movie remake of a wonderful adventure like *The Three Musketeers* could be done was to turn it into phony camp. We're jaundiced, sated. We can't even, or won't even, accept the excitement of Jules Verne. We've got submarines, so how can Captain Nemo interest us?

"This is a confused and confusing society in which we are in danger of feeling that we only semi-exist. We can't afford to lose basic emotions. When I speak on campuses, I still sense that it's declassé to be enthusiastic or, heaven forbid, inspired. It's a carry-over from Vietnam. I felt terrible back then. I spoke at Berkeley, Harvard, Kent State. I didn't get picketed once. It was a terrible blow to realize I had no social significance. The watchwords were speed, violence, cynicism. I felt hopelessly out of step. The sports that fitted the times were football, hockey, and mugging.

"In the last few years, things have gotten better. In 1975, when I got back into baseball, I felt that it was a sport whose time had come again. This is a game to be savored, not gulped. There's time to discuss everything between pitches or between innings. Baseball is a game that encourages our natural gregariousness. The sixties was a time for grunts or screams. Football passed baseball. Now maybe we've reached a point where we have a desire to talk again. I hope so. I think conversation is our natural state."

Baseball's time may have come, but Veeck wonders whether his fellow owners will ever truly get in touch with their sport. With the years, it has given him less and less pleasure that so many of

his grumpy predictions have come true, and that, so often, his suggested solutions have been adopted grudgingly or too late. Some twenty years ago, at a league meeting in Phoenix, Veeck proposed that baseball increase its sharing of gate receipts and also pool its TV revenues for the common good. Now those notions are in vogue. But then, the only people who wanted to listen to him were in the NFL.

"My own baseball people laughed at me, called me a communist. I didn't get one vote. The only person who contacted me was [NFL commissioner] Bert Bell. He said, 'Let's talk about this TV-money-sharing idea.' I spent a weekend at a retreat of his in New England discussing it. I didn't create the NFL system [which is now the cornerstone of the league's financial health], but I was a part of it."

At the time of the Flood decision, Veeck was equally prescient in predicting the free-agent era to come, and even in outlining its pitfalls. "I warned them about almost everything that would happen," he says without trying to hide his career-long bitterness at the way his advice has traditionally been dismissed as all show and no substance. "I am on record since 1941 as saying that the reserve clause was legally and morally indefensible. I knew its death was coming.

"But I also told them there was a way out. Years ago, the U. S. Government sued the vast DuPont holding company and won some antitrust rulings. However, the Supreme Court decided that it was unfair to DuPont stockholders to drastically change the company's framework at one stroke. They authorized 'an orderly transition to be done under a ten-year period under the aegis of the courts.' That's what baseball should have tried to get—an orderly transition period from the reserve clause to free agency under the aegis of the courts. They wouldn't have been given ten years, but they also wouldn't have had the disaster of every player in baseball being thrown on the open market in such a short space of time. And we would have a permanent structure for the game now, instead of facing a labor crisis every spring."

Part of the reason Veeck has so seldom held sway in baseball's meeting rooms is his manner (brash) and posture (unyielding). He rubs his lonewolf methods in the faces of his foes and delights in making stuffed shirts squirm. Often he has taken too much

pleasure in being right and not enough in compromising to achieve his ends. "I've got a helluva temper," Veeck says.

Nature abhors a vacuum and so does Veeck. If he sees a viable position that no one else has staked out, he'll go for it on the dead run, even if he has to dope out some of the ramifications as he goes. A typical example came the day of the release of American hostages from Iran. Commissioner Bowie Kuhn, a Veeck nemesis because he led the owners who defeated Edward DeBartolo's attempt to buy the Chisox, unilaterally issued lifetime major league passes to all fifty-two hostages.

"Don't get me started," growled Veeck as soon as he saw the Telex notification to teams from Kuhn. Within minutes he was on the phone to the commissioner's office, leaving a long hot message for Kuhn.

"This is the first time since the Barbary pirates that we've paid ransom," said Veeck. "And then we sent a fireship and blew them up. Are these hostages supposedly heroes? Did they do something wonderful? I thought they were professionals doing a job. And the job went badly. I have sympathy for them. But I don't think we should, as a country, congratulate ourselves for losing or celebrate our defeats as though they were victories. Did we give lifetime passes to the POWs of World War II?"

"This is just a grandstand play by baseball, and it disgusts me. We've lost our heroes, and these are pretty poor substitutes. When my Browns finished last, we didn't give them World Series rings. Well, I have registered my complaint. Doubtless, you will get no others."

After Veeck was off the phone, he added, "Bowie is always jumping into some highfalutin thing, trying to set a grand moral tone. Bowie's problem is that he's not really sure whether or not he was named after a racetrack."

Since Veeck adores a dangerous idea, it is a measure of his self-knowledge that he has chosen to love a person that is yin to his yang. Veeck's wife, Mary Frances, who was billed as "the world's most beautiful press agent" when she pitched the Ice Capades in the late forties, has made a career, Veeck claims, "of getting me out of trouble after I get myself into it." Where Veeck sometimes is a roiling sea under heavy weather, Mary Frances Ackerman has the placidity of a sequestered pool. Veeck, for all his charm and

generosity, is essentially a self-absorbed personality—one concerned about his own thoughts, his own opinions, his own projects, and his own legacy. His wife is one of those rare people who are so self-assured and at peace that they can concern themselves with others.

Whenever he mentions his wife—and mother of six of his nine children—Veeck gets a look in his eye usually associated with pathetically love-struck kids. "She's brighter than I am," he confides to those about to meet her. Then, later, he says confidently, "See, I told you."

Veeck's radio show in Chicago was called "Mary Frances and Friend." That probably comes closest to his own view of the matter. They seem different. He is the free-thinker, the "very casual Catholic," who says, "I believe in God, but I'm not too clear on the other details. Sometimes, when I look at the world, I don't quite know why it wasn't created a little better." She is the daily communicant. He makes friends and enemies, she makes only friends.

However, as in many strong marriages, their faces assume almost identical expressions when they hear a story—some parable from the living world—that moves them both in the same way. Veeck, talking about his boyhood friend John Lardner, recalls how that son of Ring Lardner "supported four families at one time. He was working day and night, free-lancing stories for magazines in Australia, to help keep relatives afloat."

"I think it was five families," Mary Frances says, and quietly names them.

Talk turns to another gifted reporter who has been blackballed nationally ever since he got into money trouble and took a kick-back from a fight promoter about whom he was writing. "I wish, just once in my life, I could write five hundred words as well as that man," says Veeck, who has co-authored four autobiographical books. "Journalism prefers a Simon-pure mediocrity to a touch of tarnished genius."

"Isn't that the way of the whole world?" observes Mary Frances.

The man in Chicago who danced with his wife was probably Bill Veeck.

The quality in Veeck that most sets him apart is not his success

as a baseball executive. Plenty of others have taken two teams to the World Series as he has the 1948 Indians and the 1959 White Sox. Nor does his promotional skill make him unique, although he has consistently done more at the gate with less product than any baseball hustler in history. Even Veeck's breadth of serious interests would simply make him the norm in a university faculty lounge.

No, if Veeck were to walk through *Pilgrim's Progress*, his name would be Courage. It has been said that courage is man's chief virtue because it makes all the other virtues possible. Veeck has always had the courage to follow his instincts unquestioningly.

"I was the only one-legged guy in line at the Rotunda at five A.M. to see John Kennedy lying in state," says Veeck, who thinks nothing of flying 1,000 miles when his emotions demand.

When Veeck was told three years ago that he could not get a visa to visit Cuba, he simply chartered a plane and landed in Havana. He wanted to see the then-and-now of Batista and Castro. So he did.

"If you got off the main street in Cuba twenty-five years ago, you were in abject poverty. Men would sell their sisters. People were living ten to a room. Now, nobody has a great deal, but everybody has something. They can all remember 'how it used to be,' so everyone is happy. No one wants too much. But that purity of purpose will change before long. You're looking at a slice of the revolutionary process that is so fleeting. In time, the human animal will emerge for what it is—just that, a voracious animal."

Sam Johnson, asked by a woman once if he thought mankind was "naturally good," replied, "No, madam, no more than a wolf."

That appreciation of the wolfishness in man has served Veeck well. He learned as a child that the paragons of his father's National League champion Cubs "were mostly drunks off the field and craftsmen on it." By the time he was twelve, he had, literally, tried on the shoes of his idol—the bandy-legged 5-6 Hack Wilson, who once drove in 190 runs—and discovered that they were too small for him.

The Veeck creed is a savvy locker-room mix of calculated wariness and instinctive magnanimity. "Most people will act better than you'd expect, if you'll give them a chance to," says Veeck,

probably knowing that Faulkner said it first. Veeck's method is to greet all comers with open arms, but with a hand on his wallet. He is fascinated with the particulars of personality. "Nothing beats a well-told tale," he says. To that end, he has made an avocation of exploring and examining every out-of-the-ordinary fellow who crosses his path. "I'd rather give a speech at the federal pen than on the Gold Coast," he says. "And I seem to go over better there, too."

Is Bill Veeck the guy who holds hands—that's right—with Mary Frances? And who discusses Salvador Dali with his daughter Marya, a painter? ("I love him better now that I'm grown," Marya says. "When I was a child, it seemed he gave so much of himself to everybody he met, when he could have been giving it to me.")

Or is he the guy who recently walked into a predominantly black Southside saloon full of boisterous gusto? Four Africans at the bar erupted in delight. "Bill, you ugly son-of-a-bitch, come here," roared one who was wearing a three-piece suit and \$50,000 worth of jewelry. Veeck answered with a cannonade of laughter and a salute—he raised his leg with a flip of the hip until his peg was head high.

Holding Veeck in a hug-hammer-lock, the big man poured out his troubles, just as folks always have to Veeck. "My ex-wife is after me again. I pay her \$45,000 a month. I give her \$400,000 for a New Year's gift. And now she has tried to get an injunction to keep me from leaving the country. You are a wise man, Bill. What am I going to do?"

"Why would you want to leave our country, Cawlee? Isn't it a little hot for you back home?" chided Veeck. "By the way, what is the name of your father's country this week?"

"From no other American would I take such abuse. The best families in America invite me into their homes, but I will not go. I spit on them. They are oppressors. I am a revolutionary," said the African, son of a Third World dictator, as the bar lights danced off his gold watch with his initials inlaid in diamonds. "What are you drinking? Michelob? Waitress, bring Mr. Veeck six more beers on my tab."

After Cawlee had moved on like a squall line following the twists of the Ganges, Veeck said quietly, "He is not entirely the

fool he seems. I sort of like him. He left his father's principality for, shall we say, everyone's mutual benefit. But he'll return some day. Maybe to be a ruler. I am curious about my new friend Cawlee. There are things I have yet to learn about him."

Soon, six beers arrived in the hands of an embarrassed waitress. "Miss," said Veeck, "send six beers to each member of Cawlee's party."

The beer-buying war was on. Five minutes later, Veeck's table and the one next to it were so covered with Michelobs, courtesy of Cawlee, there was barely room for the ash trays and nuts.

"This is Af-ri-can hospitality," intoned Cawlee, with his elegant English prep-school accent. "You will not leave until you have drunk them all."

Two hours later, Cawlee's army of Michelobs had turned into a staggering body count of dead soldiers by Veeck and his small party. As he left the watering hole, Veeck veered toward Cawlee's company to inform them that the challenge of African largesse had been met. For several minutes, Veeck stood at the center of a laughing, whispering, hugging confab of jewelled princes. They bellowed their farewells and he headed for the door like a sailor in heavy weather. As soon as Veeck was out of sight, his eye was clear, his walk almost steady. "I found out," he said proudly. "Cawlee is siphoning \$10 million of his country's money into Swiss banks and American real estate."

A full day, a day to exhaust even a healthy man with two legs and two ears, let alone one leg and half an ear. But he is not finished. He will take Mary Frances to dinner, then make another speech to promote a White Sox team that, in a few days, he would no longer own any part of. Even then, he would end his day just as he began it—with hours of reading.

"I always hate to go to sleep," he says. "I'm afraid that something fascinating is going to happen and I'll miss it."

The walls of Comiskey Park, so dreary and forlorn when Veeck arrived six years ago, are a sparkling white now. When the taxi arrives at the front gate, the cab driver, Donnell Rawlings, is in a good mood. "I've been a White Sox fan since the forties," he says. "I lost faith in them for a while, but when Mr. Bill took over the team, I started coming again.

"You know, my radio doesn't work too well. They went to this

new seven volt, and mine is just a five volt—but I always listen sharp for Mr. Veeck's call. I've gotten him twice. Just like I figured, he sat up front. Only white man who ever sat up front with me.

"Right away, he found out that I'd visited the same part of Jamaica he had. He seemed to want to know all about me. I don't tell many people that I write poetry, but I told him. He sat there with a big smile on his face and made me recite everything I could remember."

Why doesn't he call Veeck by his last name—you know, Veeck, as in wreck?

"He told me to call him 'Bill.' So, I did. But when I talk about him, I call him 'Mr. Bill.' You know, out of respect."