



Bob Gibson and Stan Musial,
Spring Training 1961, Tampa Bay

NEBRASKA HOT STOVE LEAGUE

SEASON XXXVI



Angry no more.

FROM THE BULLPEN

2020 Campaign

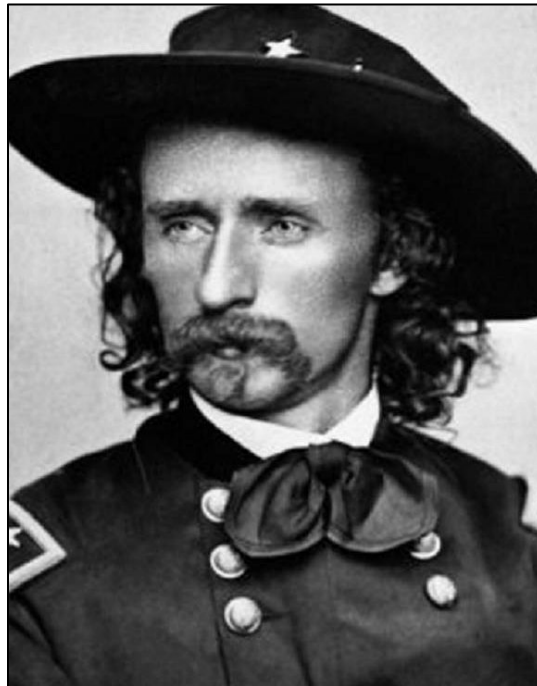
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Brethren:

Allow me to share a few random musings with you about a variety of unrelated topics which have been dancing around my boredom-ravaged brain these days.

HOW DID CUSTER PASS MUSTER?



On a recent car trip to the Black Hills to see Mount Rushmore, Michele and I noticed that South Dakotans seem to have an inordinate amount of reverence toward George Armstrong Custer, the former Civil War General and Indian fighter who led around 200 of his men to certain slaughter at the hands of an estimated 2000-3000 well-armed Lakota, Northern

Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians (led by Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse) at the Battle of Little Big Horn in Montana on June 25, 1876. Not only is the City of Custer named for him, the County of Custer also bears his name, as does the beautiful Custer State Park, where magnificent bison and diminutive prairie dogs run free without fenced restraints. Custer's name is plastered all throughout the Black Hills, which seemed odd to me in light of his abject foolishness at Little Big Horn.



Looking into the matter further, I learned that Custer finished dead last in his class at West Point, and set the school record (726) for demerits. In spite of this, his bluff, bravado and charm led him to be named a General at the tender age of 23, and he served with bravery at the Battle of Gettysburg. But in what can only be described as a checkered military career, he also faced two different courts-martial, one involving a campaign against the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians in the state of Kansas in the fall of 1866 in which Custer was accused of abandoning a number of his troops who were massacred by these Native Americans, and sentenced to one year's leave without pay. He made a remarkable comeback to return to the officership ranks of the army.

Several years later in 1874, gold was discovered in the Black Hills region thanks to a mining expedition led by Custer, and the U.S. government wanted to permanently remove the Sioux Indians from that area. In 1875, President Ulysses S. Grant ordered all Sioux out of the Black Hills of South Dakota and Wyoming by the end of the following January. Custer almost didn't get the chance to fight in the campaign that resulted in his death, however, because he testified at a congressional hearing in Washington, D.C. in a matter which implicated several members of Grant's administration, including Grant's brother. A furious Grant removed Custer from his command, and briefly had him arrested when he attempted to return to his troops. Only after a number of high ranking generals intervened was Custer allowed to return to his post.

On June 25, 1876, after several days of marching, Custer's scouts spotted the Indian camp. Fearful that the Native Americans would escape, Custer made the ill-fated decision to press on with an immediate attack, and divided his troops into three battalions and initiated the Battle of Little Big Horn, a rout of biblical proportion, with nary a survivor.



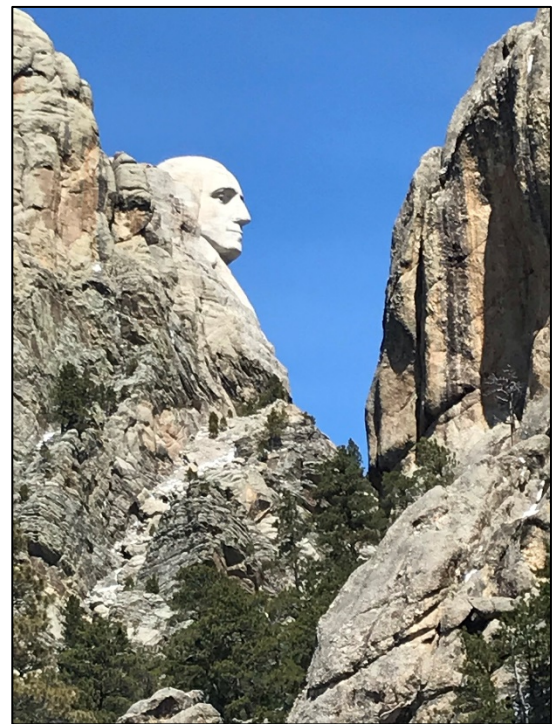
Sitting Bull



Custer's death at the age of 36 made him a martyr in the eyes of all the American palefaces who were terrified of the Native American attacks, and he was glorified in newspaper articles, books and movies. In spite of his blemished military career and his epic fail at the very end, Custer's legacy lives on even today, thanks in large part to his beloved wife Libbie's fifty-plus year campaign to cultivate his image and accomplishments by writing a series of best sellers about their lives. I have informed Michele that I expect nothing less from her after I have shed my mortal coil.

MOUNT RUSHMORE

It was great to see Mount Rushmore once again, and we had the place almost to ourselves, so social distancing was a breeze. There were a total of four cars in the parking lot.





CRAZY HORSE MEMORIAL

No trip to the area would be complete without a visit to the Crazy Horse Memorial, which I first saw as a kid back in 1966, and which still has a very long ways to go more than 50 years later, as can be seen by this photograph:





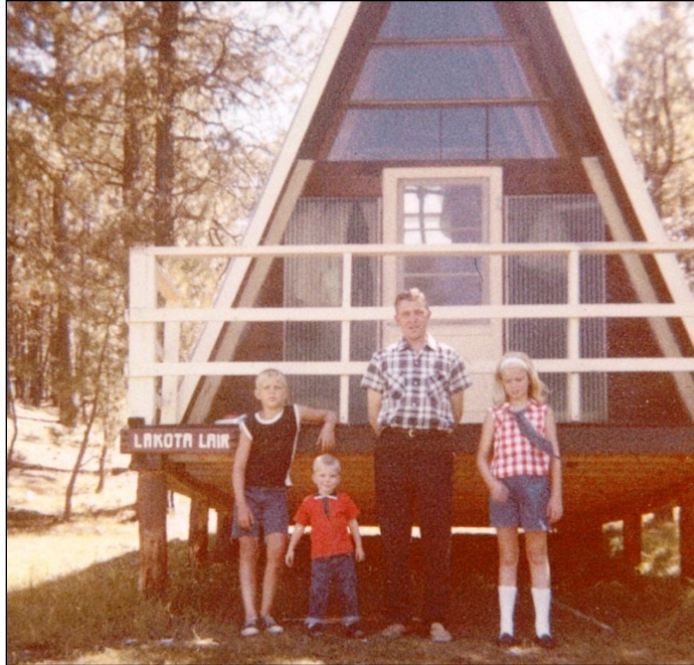
Crazy Horse

I was reminded on this trip that this ambitious project began when sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski gained recognition at the 1939 World's Fair, which attracted the attention of Chief Henry Standing Bear, who invited Korczak to the Black Hills to carve Crazy Horse. After Ziolkowski's death in 1982, his widow and many of his ten children continued on with the cause, and a number of his children and grandchildren continue to carry on the project even today, ever so slowly.

OUTLAW RANCH REVISITED



After visiting the Crazy Horse Memorial, the wife and I were making our way through Custer State Park when I spotted a sign for "Outlaw Ranch," just 1.8 miles away. We immediately changed course and paid a visit to this hallowed ground of my youth, where my mom and dad took Kathi, Dan and me in the summer of 1966 for a Lutheran church camp, instilling in me some of my best memories from my youth. I didn't even remember that the Ranch was located in the Black Hills, just that it was in South Dakota, but there it was.



The beloved Lakota Lair



With church camp friends.

Even though I was only nine years old at the time, I have some extremely vivid memories of Outlaw Ranch, and when we got to the site, much of it matched up perfectly with what was stored up in the old memory banks, including the little A-frame buildings where campers stayed.

A lot of the original Outlaw Ranch cabins have been replaced, but we were told by the caretaker during our recent visit there that they still have two of the original A-frame cabins, and that they continue to carry on many of the same activities that we participated in during that

halcyon summer of 1966, such as horseback riding in and around the rocky hills, group meals in the dining hall, and singing folk songs (like “If I Had a Hammer” and “Lord, I’m 500 Miles Away from Home”) under the stars and around a roaring campfire. As I was telling some of my kids about this wonderful trip down Memory Lane, they seemed surprised at the clarity of my memories of Outlaw Ranch from more than 50 years ago, but I think what it shows is just how important such signal experiences from our youth are to our contentedness and happiness as adults, and I give my parents all the credit in the world for making the Outlaw Ranch experience possible for us. I can only hope that my kids will have many similar great memories from their youths.



SPOILER ALERT

I am using some of my extra time that I have on my hands right now to dig deeply into *Passage of Power*, Volume 4 of Robert Caro’s masterwork on LBJ, and it is a beaut. The essential theme of the book is the passage of power from JFK to LBJ after Kennedy’s assassination on 11/22/63, and it is truly a remarkable study. I will cover some of the highlights in my usual agonizing detail in a future issue, but as a teaser, the book richly chronicles just how much trouble Johnson was in and what he was under investigations for at the exact same time of Kennedy’s fateful drive through Dallas.

As chronicled in the book, JFK at that time was in the process of trying to get the following year’s budget prepared for passage, and he was determined to keep it under \$102 billion. Does anyone want to hazard a guess as to what our current annual budget is?¹

Although nobody will ever mistake me for Bede the Venerable, my appreciation of history seems to expand exponentially with the passage of time. The Caro books on LBJ have whet my appetite to read biographies of every great political leader who has assumed power. It is fascinating stuff.

¹ The current President proposed in February a new budget of 4.29 trillion dollars. Adjusted for inflation, JFK’s 1963 budget goal of 102 billion would be equivalent to just under 862 billion today.

R.I.P. JOHN PRINE

I heard on the news this morning that legendary singer/songwriter John Prine died yesterday of the Covid-19 virus. We loved his music, the songs he wrote and the way he sang them. He survived two bouts with cancer, but succumbed to the pandemic. A true loss to the music world. RIP, Mr. Prine.



SHOUTOUT TO BROTHER DAN

While many of us are struggling to try to find a way to help out and make a difference in the COVID-19 battle, my modest and unassuming brother Dan has found a great way to contribute to the cause. He is using his 3-D printer (of course he has one!) to make face shields for use by a physician that he knows and some of his colleagues. Here is a picture of Dan sporting one of his medical creations.

His goal is to make 600-700 of these for use by medical personnel in the area.

Great job, Brutha!

AND FINALLY

And finally, has anyone seen or heard hide or hair from our Brother Baby Trumpetfish? As Underbelly says, since the epidemic began, BT has gone underground "deep as a tick" and is not taking phone calls. Just hoping that he's doing okay in these uncertain times, and not in the process of inspiring a sequel to *The Shining*.

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That's it for this issue of *FTB*. Hope that you are all well and keeping your wits, or what's left of them, about you.

Skipper