

GEORGE BOWERING / Two Bits on the Green Guy

Recently I mentioned George Stanley and baseball, and Brian Fawcett, who has been interested in George's poetry for many years, said he didn't know that George was interested in baseball. Well, in the year 2010 my wife Jean and I attended four season's home openers with him—in Seattle, Victoria, Maui and Vancouver. I told Brian to check the record: George Stanley is the author of a terrific book of poems called *Opening Day*, a title any self-respecting baseball fan poet would wish to have thought of first. But no, George Stanley's on first. In case you wanted to know.

Well, he is in *Richard III*, Act v, Scene 3, but that's in another field.

George Stanley and I have been going to baseball games together since Connie Mack put away his catcher's mitt. I thought I might tell you ten of the things we do at the ball game.

1. **THE ANTHEMS.** George likes to get there in time to hear the national anthems. I don't, so I usually loiter in the concourse while they are being sung with far too many syllables by some young female pop star wannabe. But George stands up and takes off his hat (though he doesn't do that silly US bit about trying to locate a cap bearing an ad for a transmission company over one's heart). I keep my cap on till the US song about weapons and so on is over. When the Canadian anthem starts, George sings good and loud, making sure we hear him intone "in all of us command." I don't sing at all, because the song is racist, sexist, religionist and anti-grammatical. In Maui a guy sang the Mexican national anthem because the visiting team was the Tijuana Cimarrones. He sang the chorus and all ten stanzas.

2. **HIS BROTHER GERALD.** Gerald is the guy who knows everything and has a dry sense of humour. Not just baseball. Gerald can tell you the name of the Pittsburgh Steelers' backup quarterback. It is twice as much fun when Gerald comes to a ball game with us. A few years ago in Seattle, when George was 66 and I was 64 and Gerald was 63, Gerald picked up tickets for us—at the seniors' price. When we reported this to my daughter, chuckling with naughtiness, she said, "Oh you pulled a fast one on them!"

3. THE EIGHTH INNING. George hates the eighth inning. He thinks they should jump straight from the seventh inning to the ninth inning. He hates the bottom of the eighth a little less, but he really detests the top of the eighth. He has a haunted look around his eyes in the break after the bottom of the seventh. If the visiting team loads the bases in the top of the eighth but doesn't score a run, he is a wet dishrag till the end of the game.

4. THOSE LITTLE DOUGHNUTS. George will ignore those little doughnuts, even if the fragrance made by their preparation pervades section 5 of the grandstand. But when Augie comes from Toronto for his annual vacation, wearing his old Vancouver Canadians AAA Champions tee-shirt, or when Andy's grandson Tyber comes down from Terrace in July, George springs for those little doughnuts. Sometimes I get one, even though Jean is there.

5. THE OLD GUYS WAVE. When some attendees at Nat Bailey Stadium start the wave, thus proving that we are in 1970 and a hick town, George Stanley and I do not rise or throw our hands into the air. We sit there and let the wave pass over us. Sometimes I get up and raise my hands after the wave has passed two sections to our left or right. But we do do the old guys wave. George gets up very slowly, shakily, looking as if he will not be able to achieve the standing position, then agonizingly raises his skinny old arms a little bit higher than his head. Then like an aching tortoise he reacquires a sitting position, sometimes falling into it at last. Then I count to three and begin my own laborious ascent from my seat beside him. In the time we consume accomplishing this feat a normal ballpark wave could have washed over us eight times.

6. THE SEVENTH INNING STRETCH. As soon as the third out of the top half of the seventh inning has been recorded, George gets to his feet, and I follow almost immediately. For a while we are the only spectators standing. Then the voice on the PA system tells the crowd that it is time for the seventh inning stretch, at which point most of the people in the stands begin to get it. We sing the cherished old song enthusiastically. I make sure that I shout the WITH of "take me out WITH the crowd," because 99% of the rubes around us intone, "to the crowd." When it comes to "one, two, three strikes yer out," I always make a point of getting stuck after "two." George likes that. Then, if the home team loses the game, George says, "It's a shame."

7. **SHOUTING STUFF.** There are things we shout at every game, such as, “Rodriguez? What kind of baseball name is that?” Or when another visiting player is announced: “Never heard of him!” When an opposing pitcher lets loose an errant fastball: “Craaaazy wild!” George has a specific rule in this area. He says that you can holler anything you want to at a ball game. It can be any part of speech. “Nevertheless!” he once bellowed. This is a poet speaking.

8. **THE CHICKEN DANCE.** If the entertainment organizers cause the song “YMCA” to be played on the PA between innings, George and I do the actions, but I always forget how to do the bodily spelling. George always gets it right, and I grumble about how difficult baseball can be. But I am getting so that I remember the sequence for the chicken dance. George, though, is again the master. His fingers, wings, hips, clap clap are just simply superior. Next to Vancouver Canadians co-owner Jeff Mooney, George Stanley is the best dancer in the yard.

9. **THE SUSHI RACE.** Some years back the Milwaukee Brewers baseball people decided to hold a sausage race, every home game featuring a race from right field around to first base by three, then four people dressed as giant sausages—bratwurst, Italian, etc. Then the Washington Nationals had a race among four people dressed as giant Mount Rushmore heads—Lincoln, Jefferson, etc. Pretty soon more and more ballparks had such races. There are now racing pyrogies in Pittsburgh, for example. At Nat Bailey, we have the sushi race, a run on the infield warning track from first base around to third base, among a huge round Ms. BC Roll, Mr. Kappa Maki, and Chef Wasabi. The tradition is that Chef Wasabi, with his martial arts headscarf, never wins, often suffering a loss of attention. But when Jean Baird and George Stanley and I get out our quarters to bet on the race, George always bets his 25¢ on the big green blob. He maintains that the law of averages is on his side.

10. **THE THIRD INNING RULE.** George Stanley says that going for a hotdog or a beer before the third inning is just not done. He sneers at the long lineup that forms at the beer counter even before the national anthems. The moment that the ball goes plop into some visiting player’s glove to signify the end of the second inning, George is on his feet, hand in his money pocket. “George,” I object. “Is it really the third inning if the Vancouver pitcher has not released his first pitch in the direction of the plate?” “Mere casuistry,” he replies, and off he goes to get his hotdog. Never a

hamburger. Never a bratwurst or a foot long or a smokie. Always the ordinary hotdog. He proclaims it good. I tried one once. Boy!

Poets belong at the ballpark, is what I am endeavoring to illustrate. George Stanley, author of *The Stick*, is living proof. In his Portland Beavers tee-shirt and cap, he represents the vital connection between a polis and its custodians of the divine art.