

A mother's day story

When I was a kid, one of the biggest challenges in life was deciding what to buy Mom for Mother's Day. For some reason, gifts that mom was sure to like were always too expensive. And the things we could afford, we didn't think she'd like.

Chilly Mac, one of the key members of my small band of ruffians when I was a kid, endured the same dilemma every year, just like the rest of us. His real name was MacArthur Harrison. His father was a staff sergeant in the Army and he named his only son after Douglas MacArthur, the great Army general.

Staff Sgt. Harrison was away on duty most of the time, making Chilly the man of the house. Chilly loved his mother more than he loved anyone in the world.

Chilly got his nickname because he always wore the army jacket his father gave him, even in the summer when it was hot enough to fry eggs on the sidewalk. The jacket was twice his size and he had to roll up the sleeves so they wouldn't hang over his hands. He didn't care. His father gave him that jacket and it was one of his most valued possessions.

Once in awhile one of us would ask, "Aren't you hot in that jacket?" He'd always say the same thing. "Not really. I'm just a little chilly." Hence the name: Chilly Mac. I suppose he liked the famous dish "chili mac," the same as any other kid, but the right spelling for him was "Chilly." As far as I know, the name has stuck to this day.

Chilly had saved more than \$4, and he was determined to buy something nice for his mother on Mother's Day. Four dollars was a small fortune for a 9-year-old kid in the suburbs of St. Louis in 1953.

Like the rest of us, Chilly pondered the problem day and night. A couple of weeks before Mother's Day, Chilly remembered his grandmother telling him about how to select a gift for someone else. She said, "MacArthur, whenever you don't know what to give, just think about what you'd like to get if someone were buying a present for you."

So, Chilly thought about what he'd like to have more than anything else, and that's what he bought for his mom. He bought two tickets to see the St. Louis Browns play major league base-



You can't beat a system you can't understand

By Sam Bari

ball at Sportsman's Park.

When he told the other kids what he bought, they couldn't believe their ears.

"You bought your mom what?" they said in disbelief. "She's not gonna like that," they said. But it was too late. The tickets were purchased and couldn't be refunded. They cost Chilly \$1.25 each for two grandstand seats. So he didn't have much left for anything else.

Chilly felt bad, but he was determined to take his mother to a baseball game and do what his grandmother said was best.

When Chilly gave his mother the envelope with a card and tickets inside, she opened it and smiled broadly. Chilly looked at her and said, "Mom, I'm going to take you to a baseball game." She hugged him so hard he couldn't breathe. She said, "Mac, that's the best gift I've ever been given. I've never been to a major league baseball game, and I wouldn't want to go with anyone else but you."

The grandstand seats weren't the best in the park, but they were in the second row, close to the bullpen on the right field line.

The Browns weren't doing well and the great pitcher Satchel Paige was sent to the bullpen to warm up. Chilly was thrilled to see the living legend in the flesh. Paige looked up into the grandstand and Chilly waved at him. Paige smiled and waved back. Then Paige slowed down, walked to the fence and stopped. He looked directly at Chilly's mom.

"Earlene? Earlene Ford—Is that you?" Paige asked. Chilly's mom smiled and said, "Not any more Satchel. I'm married. My name is Harrison now. This is my son, MacArthur."

"Well I'll be. Come on down here, MacArthur. Let me shake your hand," Paige said. Chilly walked down to the fence and shook the big man's hand. Chilly was speechless.

"Earlene—don't you go away. I'll meet you after the game," Paige said and trotted off to the

bullpen.

"Mom! How come you never told me you knew Satchel Paige?" Chilly blurted out. "He's one of the most famous pitchers in baseball."

"His niece and I were best friends in Alabama when we were growing up. She lived next door. I really didn't think he'd remember me," Chilly's mom said.

Well—remember her he did. Chilly and his mom went to a few games that summer and sat in box seats, courtesy of Satchel Paige. He even went to Chilly's house for dinner once and the whole gang got to meet him. It was a time we will always remember. Satchel Paige was one of the nicest, most humble men any of us ever had the privilege of meeting.

And Chilly got a new jacket. Satchel gave him a St. Louis Browns warm-up jacket with his number 29 on the back and Satchel Paige emblazoned on the front. He also signed, "To my friend Chilly Mac, from Satchel Paige" in giant letters on the lining. Chilly only wore that jacket on special occasions. I wouldn't be surprised if he got married in it.

Unfortunately, the Browns came in last place that year, and the team was sold to become the Baltimore Orioles. Satchel retired and we never saw him again. But Chilly's choice of baseball tickets for Mom on Mother's Day couldn't have been a better present.

Sometimes things work out for the best in this crazy system we can't understand.

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