

May 4

One of the nice things about working for the Barons is that we get to travel all over the country. Pepper said that in two months every time somebody mentioned “home” we would all think of being on the bus. Our first trip was to Anniston, Alabama, where we played (and beat) the Buckeyes again. Sad Sam Jones, who lost the game, came over to the bus when we were loading up and started talking about how we were not that good a team when you broke it down man to man. I looked at Piper to see if he was going to say something back but he was just smiling from ear to ear.

On the way home we stopped at a small store to pick up some bread and cold cuts for supper. When me, Piper, Charlie Rudd, and Jimmy Zapp went into the store to get the stuff, the clerk acted as if he didn't see us, just kept on talking to a customer. They were both white, and so we figured we knew what that was about. When the clerk finally asked us what we wanted, Piper said that he needed food for twenty men. The clerk looked outside and saw the team bus and asked us were we the same Birmingham Black Barons that he had heard about.

Piper said we were. Then the clerk told us he could give us five loaves of bread and ten cans of sardines for twenty dollars. Piper said we were ballplayers, not fools,

and there was no way they were going to pay that much for sardines and bread.

The clerk told Piper that he had better mind his manners, and Jimmy pulled Piper on out of the store before things got rough. When we got back on the bus, Pepper asked how come we didn't get the food and Piper told him what had happened. We didn't have anything to eat until we got back to Birmingham.

All of us were hungry and all of us were mad. Just about any white person could mess with you if you were black, and the thing was it made you mad for a little while and then it just left a hurt feeling inside of you.

When I got home my sister, Rachel, was sitting on a crate between Mama's legs, getting her hair braided. It was past seven, so I knew Daddy was off to the steel mill, where he worked. I looked in the icebox, and Rachel told me not to touch the potato salad because Aunt Jack had made it special for her. I told her to shut up because she was nothing but a half-pint, anyway. Then she said that was all right with her because men like little women.

Slap! Mama held Rachel by one of her braids and gave her a good slap. "You ain't old enough to smell your pee, girl!" Mama said. "Don't talk nothing in this house about what men like until you're grown! You hear me?"