

CHAPTER 1

Sam

*“You gotta be a man to play baseball for a living,
but you gotta have a lot of little boy in you too.”*

–ROY CAMPANELLA

San Francisco in February is a city in the midst of several seasonal changes. The rain can come down for days on end, the Chinese New Year parades litter the city streets with lights and confetti, and the die-hard baseball fans count down the days to when pitchers and catchers report to spring training. Baseball in San Francisco got a real boost in 1958, when Horace C. Stoneham moved the New York Giants from the Polo Grounds of upper Manhattan to Seals Stadium at the corner of Bryant and Sixteenth. Willie Mays, “The Say Hey Kid,” was the star attraction as the starting center fielder, and the San Francisco Giants Baseball Club was formed.

Fifty-two years later, and with no World Series titles to claim, the fan base was loyal, charismatic, and weathered. On the positive side, the new ballpark, “The House that

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Barry Built,” was a dramatic improvement over Candlestick Park, and the team was only seven outs away in game six from winning the 2002 World Series. These, along with some great individual events and Hall of Fame players, were the highlights. Yet the city by the bay, the city of change, the city of acceptance, and the ultimate city of creativity couldn't seem to get their hands on the Commissioners Trophy. Chief among these fans, and at the front of the line every year for his season ticket, was Sam, a six year old chocolate Labrador retriever who lived with his family in a “Rousseau Flat” in the Marina.

Sam had lived in San Francisco ever since his family had bought him from a breeder as a puppy. He came from a long line of excellent water dogs. Hunting and working in and around the water were his best natural traits. However, growing up in a flat in the city with a few young children had made Sam a bit more domesticated, and the closest he got to the water were his walks to Fort Mason and the occasional run along the beach at Crissy Field. Still, Sam had no complaints. He had his family, his routines, his San Francisco Giants, and, most of all, his mentor and best friend, Larry.

Larry was a ten year old pug, who, unlike Sam, was made for city life. His stature and short legs made running for long periods of time very difficult. Strutting around the house or down the crowded Chestnut Street and looking regal were

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exactly his cup of tea. Sam and Larry had met five years ago when Sam's family moved into the lower flat at 1117 Bay Street. Larry, typically very reserved with strangers, knew that there was no avoiding knowing Sam, as he was in the building and they shared a common backyard. For Larry, the big city of San Francisco was very small, and that was how he liked it. He would have to train Sam a bit to make this predictably rambunctious breed tolerable as his flat mate.

As an impressionable and large footed one year old, Sam was bumping into everything in and out of the house, and he couldn't quite figure out how not to get into trouble on his walks with his owner and the baby stroller. For some reason, he always smelled something amazing just up ahead and would forget he was on a leash. Then he would become fixated on a new smell on the other side of the side walk. Sadly, this would occur just as his owners had one hand on the stroller, one on his leash, and all while juggling a cup of coffee from Peets. One false move by Sam and the cup of coffee was inevitably spilled, causing the baby to cry.

Worse yet, for some reason, was Sam's tremendous curiosity when it came to other humans and animals. His unabashed openness led him directly to whatever or whom-ever he met with a smile, a wag of the tail, and maybe even a paw or two for good measure. The paws on humans didn't exactly work too well from the humans' perspective, and

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neither did his poorly located nose sniffs. It appeared that Sam had a problem.

Larry, the older and wiser pug, was quick to point out to Sam that, if he didn't want to always be getting in trouble, he had better learn the ways of city life.

Larry really believed and lived by these mottos, and his life was just fine. Sam, being far away from his natural environment and appearing like he was always one step away from the pound, decided to follow Larry's lead.

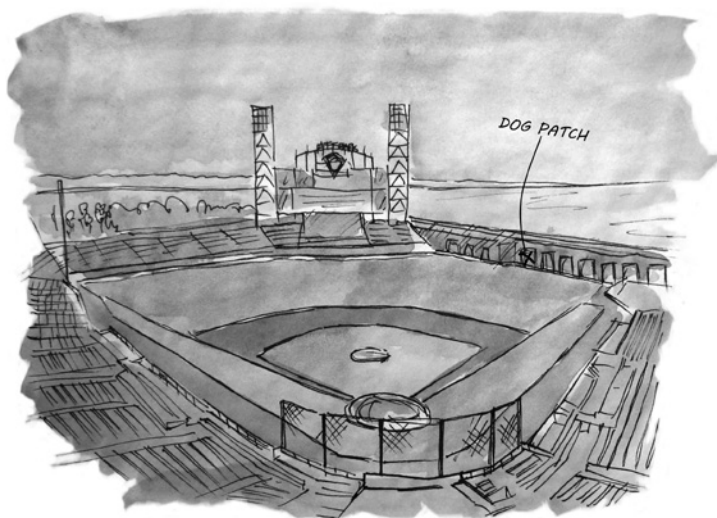
"Larry's Laws" for city life helped out Sam quite a bit, and his owners were very excited to see that some of "the puppy" had gone out of him. Sam was given a few more privileges and, in fact, was allowed to have his own doggy door to the backyard. He was even given his very own dog house right next to Larry's. Hanging out in the backyard with Larry was where Sam learned about the great game of baseball and that San Francisco had a home team named the Giants.

Larry's doghouse was different than Sam's. It was more of a palace really, and it had its own radio. Sam's was very plain in comparison; it was a Petco special that didn't really smell like anything. The good news was that at least Sam could hear the game coming from Larry's house.

Larry appeared to know everything about baseball, and his radio was tuned to the Giants' flagship station, KNBR 680, all the time. Murph and Mac, Gary and Larry, Fitz

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and Brooks, The Razor and Mr. T – he knew them all. In fact, he had a picture of himself and the Giants’ play by play announcers, Kruk and Kuip, right next to the radio from the last time the Giants had the dog day game.



Sam learned the laws of baseball from Larry in their backyard. The game had an endless series of situations, and there was always one right thing to do. Larry seemed to know them all, and listening to the away games with him was an exercise in listening to two conversations at once. Sam had to be able to listen to the game and then listen to Larry explain what “The Book” said to do in that situation. If another team made a mistake and the Giants benefited, Larry would smile at Sam and say, “It’s all about the fundamentals Sam.”

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However, if a Giants' player or manager went against "The Book," Larry would howl and call for that person's head, and the next day he would listen anxiously to the radio to make sure all the other callers agreed with him.

The home games were a different story. When Sam was three years old, he had shown enough ability to obey and follow the rules of Larry that the Giants presented him with a season pass to the Dog Patch at AT&T Park. He was now allowed to go to the games with Larry. This was a huge step for Sam. He was ready to follow Larry, and he had learned to be a bit afraid of the city.

Larry had been going to the games for years and had a set route. He would walk down Bay Street, cross Van Ness, and catch the cable car at Hyde. The car would climb Russian Hill, and they would jump on the Number Four Muni bus, which would drop them off at the corner of King and Third. Once off the bus, it was a short walk to the base of the fifth arch way in right field, which held the exclusive Dog Patch Clubhouse.

"The Patch," as it was known, held about one hundred dogs, and Sam came to learn that, like all small groups, there was a code to be followed. The good news for Sam was that Larry knew the code, and Sam was soon enough a member of the club, as everyone could see how much he loved the Giants.

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Larry turned out to be a bit of a picky traveler. If anything was amiss in the schedule or if anyone made a small misstep, he was on it. The best way to describe it was that he was living his life in a constant state of disappointment. The tourists on the cable car, the kids on the muni, the smell of the bay in McCovey Cove – something was always not as good as it used to be, or there was reason for a lament. Sam, for his part, wasn't too worried about those things. He loved the Giants, he loved being a part of his family, and he loved being in the club at “the Patch.”

For several years things didn't change much for Sam or the Giants. The years came and went. The team was good but lacked hitting, so they could never get to the World Series. Sam's routines were set, and he settled into the comfort that comes with certainty. However, in February San Francisco is a city in the midst of change, and in February 2010 the first of several changes knocked on Sam's door.