

Isn't It Amazing How You Got to Be You?

Rev. Dewey Johnson, Pastor Emeritus

"For who has known the mind of the Lord?" – Romans 11:34 (NRSV)

The Psalmist says of God, *"You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."* True, the human body is an amazing piece of work, but, once out of the womb, I find it also amazing the experiences that God sends our way, experiences that contribute to the persons we become.

Of all the many things that come our way, why is it some opportunities seek us out and some don't? Why is it we've made the choices we have? Why is it we've had the jobs we have? Why is it we live where we do? If we'd been looking the other way, would we have even met the person who became our spouse? Why are we interested in this and not that?

I thought of the experiences that God sends our way over the past few days as I rooted for Albuquerque's Eastdale Little League All-Stars to become the second team from New Mexico to make it to the World Series in Williamsport. (Unfortunately, they lost in Waco.) It has been exactly 60 years since the first team made it. I know a little bit about the first team because I was there, at least on the fringes, Roswell, 1956. I wasn't on the All-Star team, which was mostly 12-year-olds, but I played with them in regular league play as a 10-year-old.

Being kids, we'd had no idea of the forces set in motion to occupy our time and interest. We didn't know that in 1939 Carl Stotz started what became known as Little League in Williamsport, PA. It spread across the country helping keep kids like my neighbors out of trouble. We heard of its arrival on the other side of town in 1953, but didn't experience it in our neighborhood until 1956.

Nor did we know back in 1954 that a fellow named Joe Bauman had just moved to Roswell because he had the opportunity to buy a gas station. This also meant he'd play first-base for the Roswell Rockets, our minor league baseball team, instead of the Artesia Oilers. We soon found out that Big Joe was quite a player. He hit a minor league record 72 homeruns in 1954.

It's hard to understate the excitement that Big Joe generated during the summer of '54. We kids would ride our bikes, hitchhike, or stow away in a neighbor's car if we couldn't talk our parents into taking us out to the ballpark. It was baseball mania. And the one thing we all remember was Big Joe trotting back to the dugout after hitting a homer. Men in the grandstands would walk down and stick rolled-up dollar bills, or fives or tens, through the chicken wire separating the field from the grandstand. (An established practice.) Years later a batboy said that Joe lived all summer off the homerun cash. He didn't even cash his monthly payroll checks until winter.

(Even when he didn't knock it out of the park, Big Joe hit it so hard that he at times knocked a hole in the outfield fence. A young man had just graduated from UNM and was pitching for the Albuquerque Dukes. Playing in Roswell one night, Big Joe hit two triples off him, one knocking a hole in the fence. The young man's name: Pete Dominici. He later went on to play for the Senators.)

In 1956 the Roswell Lion's Hondo All-Stars took the train to Williamsport and won the 10th Little League World Championship. It was simply the thing to do given the baseball mania that had begun in Roswell two years earlier. Field like the Roswell Rockets and bat like Big Joe. The homerun king wasn't playing any more, but he still lived down the street. Filled up our parents' cars with gasoline and fixed their flats. He was still an influence. Said, "Go get 'em!"

Who can account for things that happen to us as individuals or as families or as communities, given all the many things that could happen or not happen? We may be able to go back and trace a few causes, but there were even more causes for Roswell's success in 1956. I couldn't list them all. I don't know them all. Truly, who knows the mind of God?"