

# Hell We Were American

*by* Steven Gowin

Dad managed the team which meant he scored the game in the score book that no one but Dad ever saw.

Back then every little burg had a ball club of grown ass men... Van Meter and Linden, DeSoto and Dallas Center.

Wally Murphy and Shorty White pitched. The Dooley brothers held down left and center. The new guy, Billy Olsen, guarded the second bag. Hit by a pitch meant a bad bruise. This was baseball, not softball, the real deal.

Ages ranged from high school kids in the Legion League to 40 year olds, corn farmers or tire factory men with four or five kids. Lutherans, Catholics, Methodists, and screw the church, like Dad.

Wives and children filled the bleachers and hooked little hands through cyclone fence backstops to watch. Babies and toddlers slept in the hot backseats of Biscaynes and Fairlanes.

Somebody always drove a gravel road to get to the game. Over at Royal England's, post game feed, kids broke off trumpet flowers to suck the nectar while burgers and weenies burnt over hellish hot charcoal.

We danced the pee dance after too much Seven Up and tasted odd Jello dishes embedded with otherwise perfectly fine fruit. The Dooly kids and Rex Rhodes snuck to the creek to fire half smoked cigs they'd picked up from the dugout floor.

The team, still in cleats and sanitariums gnawed chicken wings and nursed ice cold Falstaff until after dark when somebody always

spotted the Echo satellite overhead, a shiny blip slowly crossing the black sky, but ours by god.

Screw those Russians and that damned Sputnik. We had baseball. Hell we were American.

