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THE EXAMINED LIFE

The Boston Globe

Sports therapy

By Joshua Glenn | September 25, 2005

"THE BUCKNER THING was bad, but Grady was worse," says 37-year-old Tim McCarney, referring--as we well know--to Red Sox coach Grady Little's disastrous decision to leave Pedro Martinez in the 7th game of the 2003 American League Championship Series. "After Game 7, I called my friend Tom Deady and said, 'I can't do this any more. I have to have an outlet, next season, to channel all this angst and grief.'" So at the beginning of the '04 baseball season, the two fans launched *Surviving Grady*, a Sox blog whose angry, uproarious game-by-game account of what turned out to be the most therapeutic baseball season ever has just been published, in book form (by AiT/Planet Lar), under the same title. McCarney, a Boston-based marketing professional and writer, spoke with me from his home office via telephone last week.

IDEAS: Stewart O'Nan, who wrote the 2004 Sox season chronicle "Faithful" with Stephen King, called your book "brilliant."

McCARNEY: We found out, around the time their book came out, that O'Nan had followed our blog during the 2004 season--in fact, he bought our T-shirts. He enjoyed our blog, he said, for the same reason that other Sox fans, from around the world, told us they did after the World Series. It helped them cope with the premonition that the Sox were somehow going to screw things up, like they always had.

IDEAS: When the Sox do well, your blog exults that life is "all sunshine and The Partridge Family," or it's "Luke Skywalker blowing up the Death Star."

McCARNEY: I watched too much TV growing up in the '70s in West Roxbury, and ours was exclusively a baseball home. Sports ended when baseball season ended, usually in tears, and my entire family spent the winter brooding over mistakes the Sox had made. The Red Sox were part of the pop culture of my childhood--I can recall minor players from the '78 team easier than I can the superstars of the 1980s or '90s.

IDEAS: Speaking of the '78 Sox, what's with all your absurdist fantasies about the ghost of Butch Hobson, for example, or scientists

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McCARNEY: The great players of the '70s spring to my mind at times of crisis, I guess. I went to my first ballgame in '78, when I was 10, and collected Red Sox cards and memorabilia for at least five years after that. After harrowing Sox losses I'll surround myself with artifacts like my pin of Fred Lynn and Jim Rice--the "Gold Dust Twins." People always ask me if I know how much these things are worth today, but I would never sell any of it.

IDEAS: You had a crisis of faith after Game 3 of the ALCS last year. Will the coming weeks be as dramatic for you?

McCARNEY: If the gods of baseball had asked me, 'If you could script any fantasy for the 2004 ALCS, what would it be?' I would have replied, 'To see the Sox pushed to the brink by the Yankees, then pull off the single greatest comeback in sports history.' And that's what happened. So I feel more philosophical about things now. There's actually a part of me that fears the Sox making it to the Series this year, since last season I was reduced to an extra from 'The Omega Man,' sitting bug-eyed at my desk counting the minutes until the start of the next game.

Joshua Glenn is associate editor of Ideas. E-mail jglenn@globe.com.

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