



# THE DEACON'S

# Baseball

BY MARK PETREY

*Mint condition,  
signed by a World Series  
team—but my friends wanted to  
use it in a game.*

Buried in the sock drawer of my dresser is a baseball. Sometimes while looking for an elusive missing sock, I'll pull that baseball out, roll it around in my hand, and examine it. At first glance, it's a normal, slightly used baseball, but it's actually much more.

In the 1960s my family was living in the suburbs of Pittsburgh. We lived in a diverse neighborhood. My friends were all of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, which led to some pretty deep discussions even as grade schoolers. But the one thing we all agreed on was baseball and the Pittsburgh Pirates.

In 1960, the Pirates won the World Series, beating the Yankees in a close series. One pitcher for the Pirates was Vernon Law. The media had dubbed him "The Deacon," because he was Mormon. He went to the same meetinghouse as I did, and I was friends with his kids. After the Pirates won the World Series, "The Deacon" brought a bunch of signed baseballs to hand out at church. The balls had been signed by most of the team including Roberto Clemente, Smoky Burgess, Bob Skinner, Bill Mazeroski, Dick Groat, and, of course, Vernon Law. I was lucky enough to get one of the balls. On the ride home from church, I couldn't wait to show my friends. That ball became my pride and joy. I placed it on the dresser in my bedroom, where I could admire it every day.

Summer meant playing baseball. Games would go on for hours with no limit on innings. Sometimes the scores would run into the hundreds! We would play in empty lots, someone's backyard, or in the street. One thing that always seemed to present a challenge for us was actually finding a ball to play with. Pittsburgh is very hilly and

wooded. A wild throw or foul tip could land deep in the trees, never to be found. We lost lots of balls.

On one muggy afternoon, we were trying to get a game up, and as usual we couldn't find a ball anywhere. One of my friends suggested that we use my prized, signed ball. I resisted but eventually gave in to the pressure and ran home to get my 1960 Pirates World Series ball.

After the game, I took the ball home, examining it carefully. It had a few scrapes and grass stains on it, but I thought it wasn't too bad. Still, I felt sick to my stomach. I put it back on the dresser where it sat until the next time we needed a ball. This time it was a little easier to use it. It already had a few scrapes on it; a few more wouldn't do a lot of harm.

Each time it became easier and easier to justify using the ball. After a while, the names were totally covered in grass stains. It was pretty scuffed up. I tried to clean it with some soap and water, but that made it worse. I didn't want to see the ball anymore, so I put it in a drawer, out of sight. I was embarrassed and ashamed of what I'd done and didn't want to be reminded every day. I'd taken one of my prized possessions and ruined it for a stupid game. I've kept that ball all these years, still in my dresser drawer.

As I roll it around in my hand, I can still visualize the names written on the clean, white leather. The names are almost invisible now, covered with stains, or rubbed off by use. I suppose I keep the ball as a reminder of the foolishness of youth or the consequences of bad choices. The lessons are there to be learned. How easily we sacrifice our most valuable possession for fleeting enjoyment. How easily we give in to peer pressure. My baseball can never be restored to its original condition. But if we sin, the Lord Jesus Christ, through His Atonement, gives us the opportunity to repent and have Him clean the grass stains and scuff marks off our souls and restore them to a spotless condition. **NE**