

C A R L E R S K I N E

This conversation between Carl Erskine and Walter Langford is being taped in Carl's office in the First National Bank of Anderson, Indiana, on May 8, 1987.

WL: Carl, tell me when you signed your first contract in pro ball and where did yo go in the minors?

CE: I was born and raised right here in Anderson, Indians, and was scouted in high school. In those days there was no draft and so major league scouts could talk to a player who .. in fact, they started talking to me (the Cubs) when I was a sophomore in high school. Well, when I graduated from high school I would have gone into some (hopefully) pro ball, but I was drafted into the Navy. Had to spend a little over a year. As soon as I got out of the Navy, the Dodgers signed me. Mr Rickey personally signed me, and gave me a bonus, which was unheard of by baseball standards in those days, particularly for Mr. Rickey, who didn't throw money around. And the irony of the whole thing was that Boston (Braves) tried to sign me. I used to throw batting practice up there and Billy Southworth liked me. That's ironic, for I see his name right here on the this open page. So they put heat on me. The Dodgers had scouted me in high school and had me come to New York as a high school graduate and had me work out, so they had their hooks in me pretty well. I wanted to play for the Dodgers. So I called the Dogers and said the Braves were putting heat on me. Mr. Rickey sent for my parents to come to Boston during the All-Star Game in '46 and signed me in the Kenmore Hotel. I was nineteen. We went up to the suits and Mr. Rickey signed me and gave me a

bonus. In order to beat the Braves, who had offered me a \$2500 bonus, Mr. Rickey gave me \$3500. Then the Braves blew the whistle on the Dodgers for signing me as a service man. I had been discharged in the few weeks following that signing and had gone to Danville, Illinois in the Three-Eye League to finish the season. I got there in late July. By the end of the season (I had played there a month and a half), Happy Chandler called me into his office in Cincinnati. He was the Commissioner of Baseball at that time. He said the Dodgers violated a directive by signing me at that time, so he was declaring me a free agent. In the ensuing days, although I had offers then from the Red Sox, the Braves, the Phillies, the Cubs, I wanted to re-sign with the Dodgers. So, although I had offers of up to \$10,000, which was amazing in those days, I said to the Dodger scout, Stan Fiesel (?), who lived in Indianapolis and scouted me all through high school, "Mr, Fiesel, if the Dodgers will give me an additional \$5000 above the \$3500 I already have, I'll re-sign with the Dodgers." And that's what I did. Now don't ask me why I took less money than I could have gotten ..

WL: Well, a lot of people do that.

CE: But I wanted to play for the Dodgers. It was just a break for me to get to negotiate a second time. Dizzy Dean, years later, interviewing me said, "I don't believe it. You got two bonuses out of Branch Rickey?" Then he turned to the TV camera and looking out at the audience, said, "I thought two no-hitters were something great, but two bonuses from Branch Rickey beat that by a mile."

WL: I think all the old St. Louis Cardinals would agree with that.

CE: So I started then in the Three-Eye League, which was a Class B league, and I played the next full season there. Played a winter in Cuba in the winter league. Mr. Rickey insisted that I pitch in a winter league for experience. That would have been the winter of '47. I came back in '48 in spring training and went to Ft. Worth, Texas, where I played half a year and was called up to the Dodgers in the middle of that season.

WL: That was '48?

CE: Then I was up that year, back for a little bit the next spring, up again in '50, sent to Montreal for a couple of months at their Triple A farm, brought back by mid-year and then stayed for the rest of my career in the big leagues.

WL: When you got up in '48, was Durocher still there as manager or had Shotton taken over?

CE: It was right at the pivotal point. Durocher had been manager of the club during my year at Ft. Worth, Texas, and kept trying to get the Dodgers to bring me up. Mr. Rickey says, "He's too young, he's too green." The Dodgers had played a spring game that year in Ft. Worth, and Robinson was in his second year. He came over to me after the game and said, "Young man, I don't know you, but I watched you pitch three innings today, and you can't stay in this league. You're going to be with us soon." That was a big boost to me, because Jackie of course was a new name on the scene, the first black, etc., but he looked me up after that game. What happened was that Durocher got in trouble with the Commissioner. He passed a note or something to some underworld character right at the ball park one day. The looks of it was enough to cause the Commissioner to suspend him, and that's when I came up. I was brought up because of Durocher, but by the time I was actually physically with the team he had been suspended. Burt Shotton was the interim manager. Leo had been one of my great boosters and really had encouraged me. He now had been suspended and then fired, and then immediately upon his release from his suspension, the Giants signed him. So, all of a sudden Leo, my friend, is now the Giants manager. I'm pitching in the Polo Grounds, the first time in my life in the Polo Grounds, and I'm a little nervous anyway. Leo is coaching at third base and he is getting on me unmercifully. He's calling me some names I couldn't believe. I thought, this is my friend! I couldn't believe it. Well, he caused me to balk, and I balked in a run.

WL: That was what he was trying to do.

CE: It took me a little while to figure out that Leo really didn't hate me, he was just such a competitor ...

WL: With Leo no one on the other side was a friend during the game. He could be a great friend off the field. Now, what was your first game?

CE: My first game was the day I joined the team. I joined the team in Pittsburgh the 25th of July in 1948, and they put me in the bullpen. Nervous as I could be. But in the 8th inning Hugh Casey, who had relieved and was trying to hold a 2-run lead, got into some trouble and they brought me in. To relieve Hugh Casey, of all things. I struggled through the inning and got the side out finally. In the meantime the Pirates had taken the lead by a run or two, and so they used a pinch hitter for me in top of the 9th. We scored three or four runs and I got the win. So Burt Shotton said, "Young man, the good Lord was with you today." I believe He was always with me, but that was my first appearance in the big leagues. My second appearance was a one-inning stint three days later against the Cardinals, in which I came in with the score 2-1 in favor of the Cardinals. I pitched the top of the 9th and got the side out, and we went into the bottom of the 9th and we scored two runs. So, I pitched two innings and had two wins. Then I started against the Cubs, in my first start, and won the game. Then I had two additional starts against the Phillies and won both of them. Three complete games, and so I was 5-0 and couldn't believe it. But I had hurt my arm severely in my first start. It was very ironic. I was pitching in the rain against the Cubs in New York. In the seventh inning I was pitching to Bill Nicholson and I pulled a muscle in my shoulder. I felt it, it was like a hot knife. I can put my finger right on the spot today, because that spot healed and was re-torn, healed and re-torn until I have a scar there. That was an Achilles Heel, I guess you'd say, to me in my whole career. Duke Snider and I were roommates, and he can testify to the frustration I had in not ever knowing how that arm was going to

react on any given day.

WL: With the skills they have now in all kinds of surgery, could they have repaired that?

CE: That's questionable. But in those days the climate was such that a rookie would not go near the trainer's room. If you did, aw, they'd roast you. I went to Mr. Shotton in the second start. In other words, I hurt my arm against the Cubs, in the seventh inning, then I finished the game. But the next day I could hardly lift my arm, and I ~~was~~ was very reluctant to say anything. So I waited three or four days and they gave me another start. They were so in need of pitching at that time. So they gave me another start four days later against the Phillies, and I pitched to the sixth inning with tremendous discomfort and just almost sick at my stomach, it was bothering me so much. My stuff was pretty good, and I was ahead 1-0 in the sixth inning, and I finally told Mr. Shotton very reluctantly. I went to him on the bench and said, "Mr. Shotton, my arm is so sore. I pulled this thing the other day and it's giving me ..." He looked at me in great surprise and said, "Why, son, you're pitching a shutout. Now you go right ahead, and don't worry about it. If you get in any trouble, we'll get somebody ready." I wouldn't say any more, and I finished the game and beat the Phillies, 2-1, in a complete game. But, I must have done some real damage. So, four days later I start again, this time in Philadelphia. I struggled, as far as feeling, but I had a shutout going into the ninth inning, and ended up winning, 8-1. But I must have done some real damage to the front of my shoulder and other things, because from that point through the next several years, well, in fact, until I quit in '59 in L.A., that spot, that pull, gave me tremendous trouble. I always was very reluctant - I'm saying more X about it now than I ever did when I was playing, because I didn't want the reputation of being a sore-armed pitcher. I just hated that connotation. But I couldn't help it, so I would just go ahead, and besides, competition

was so fierce. The Dodgers had 800 players under contract in these years. And all were one-year contracts. And competition was fierce, not only to get to that spot but to keep it. And of course the Dodgers' pitching was always a little spotty. We didn't have quite the quality of pitching staff in depth that we had in the other positions. And it was by comparison, in depth, our weakness. We had some outstanding pitchers. Newcombe was an outstanding pitcher, and Preacher Roe. We had some outstanding people, but we couldn't get a combination of four starters that were consistent over a period of four or five years. When I came up Mr. Rickey was rebuilding the team after World War II, and so he accelerated youth and all of us were moved up fast. Anyway, I'm not complaining about it, I'm just saying the facts are that I had this unfortunate injury.

WL: Let me ask you this now. In your best year percentage-wise, when you were 20-6, was the arm feeling better that year?

VE: Yeah. There were stretches. The funny thing ~~was~~ about my best year was that, by the All-Star Game, in '53, I was 5-4.

WL: You're kidding. So you were 15-2 after that.

CE: Dressen took me fishing and said, "You're snake-bit. You've pitched enough good ball games this first half that you should have won 8 or 10 ball games. You get beat on one pitch, one play, you're snake-bit. I'm going to take you fishing and change your luck." So Charlie did. He took me upstate N.Y. to a friend of his and we fished. I came back and in the second half was 15-2. That is typical of my career. I would have periods when I couldn't get loose or wasn't pitching well and then I would have some - I wouldn't say brilliant - but I would have some stretches or some days that were good. But I was not real consistent.

WL: Let me inject this question. Newcombe was a great pitcher, but was he snake-bit in World Series play?

CE: That's one of these unexplainable things that happen in sports. I can't

explain it any more than I can explain how some .210 hitter can hit a Hall of Fame pitcher better than a Hall of Fame hitter can. Those are the magic mystiques or whatever of baseball. Newcombe pitched one of the greatest games that has been pitched in the World Series and got beat, 1-0. And then Don, who was a sensitive guy even ^{though} he seemed loud and boisterous. That was a come-on, in a way. And being one of the early black players, and handling that on top of the pressures of a major league team, I think Don just had trouble handling that. And then when he got in the World Series and ~~got beat~~ and got beat by that home run by Henrich in '49, he pitched a tremendous game, and that got him off on the wrong foot. He took a loss, then he came back in other starts and had days that didn't match his ability. And then Berra, he was his nemesis. I always remember in Ebbets Field, after a number of tries, Newcombe was getting another start. He is so determined, especially that he's not going to let Berra beat him, and he has good stuff, excellent stuff, and he strikes Berra out in a critical situation. But Campy dropped the ball. Nobody ever knows whether it was a foul tip or whether Roy's hand, which was bad in those days because he had a nerve problem in his left hand. He'd had an operation on it and it caused his hand to begin to draw up. He couldn't use his left hand real well. And he dropped third strikes occasionally. Well, this critical pitch and he struck Berra out, he had him! And the ball popped out of Roy's glove and the umpire said it was a foul ball. The next pitch was over Berra's head, and he hit in into Bedford Avenue. And that's the day that Newcombe punched the parking attendant. I don't know if you remember that. He was so frustrated. It was like Fate had him by the back of the neck and wouldn't let go. But that's one of those quirks that kept Newcombe from being recognized as one of the best pitchers in baseball during his time. Oh, he was recognized as that, but he doesn't get the sustained accolades that he deserves, because of that and his personality - he was a little rough on the writers - and so they didn't always see him in a favorable light.

WL: Well, they didn't always see Ted Williams in a favorable light, either.

Now, you get into the World Series for the first time in '49. That was when Newk lost in the ninth inning, 1-0. Do you think that influenced the whole team, was that the turning point right there?

CE: Well, you remember what happened in the second game, when our starting pitcher was Preacher Roe. And I believe against Lepat. That was another 1-0 ball game. But Roe beat Lepat, 1-0.

WL: I see in the book that it was Raschi he beat.

CE: Raschi? Okay. Back-to-back 1-0 games. No, I wouldn't say that first game set the tone for the Series. We only won one game in that Series.

WL: No, and Newcombe didn't fare well in ~~that~~ ^{the 4th} game.

CE: I pitched a little relief in that game. I think the first man I faced in my World Series debut was Joe DiMaggio.

WL: Let me see. No, in your first inning he didn't come to bat. But he led off the next inning.

CE: Okay, it was the next ^{infield}inning. He hit a towering/fly ball. I don't think I ever saw a pop fly that high. They got some runs off of me in that inning. Bobby Brown, as I remember, doubled off me

WL: No, Carl, in that game you only pitched the one inning. It was in the 5th game that Brown doubled.

CE: Yeah. Well, now he's the president of the American League, and ~~never~~ ~~lets you forget that~~ he always reminds me of that.

WL: Never lets you forget. Now, in 1950 you lost out in the pennant race by two ~~times~~ games, but it wasn't decided until the last day.

CE: The decision was on the last day, yeah, because the Phillies had a bad week. They had a seven-game lead going into the last week, and between the Giants and the Dodgers their lead dwindled until on the last day we could have caught them.

WL: What was your salary when you came up to the majors?

CE: When I came up in '48 they had just instituted the minimum salary of \$5000. So I was on that basis, though I wasn't there all year. The second

year I got \$6000, the third year \$7000, the fourth year \$9,500, the fifth year \$12,500. So it took me five years in the big leagues to reach \$10,000.

WL: And what was your highest?

CE: In '53, when I won 20 and lost 6, then won a game in the Series and set what was then a Series strikeout record, Bavasi was the general manager and in Atlanta

~~But~~ I was at the winter meetings/because I was player representative.

I was in the hotel lobby and I walked through and Hank Greenberg, who was general manager of Cleveland, was sitting with Bavasi on a davenport. I walked over and they spoke to me and Greenberg says to Bavasi, "Well, Buzzy, I'll bet you \$10 you won't give this boy what he wants this year." Who knows how they had it set up? You know, I was just a kid who had gone 20-6 and led the league, etc. So Buzzy pats me on the back and says, "Oh, Carl and I won't have any trouble." And Greenberg says, "No, I'll bet you ten bucks you don't give him what he wants." I can't remember just what I had been making, but it ended up that I got an \$18,000 raise, which put me to \$28,500, plus I got an agreement with Buzzy for the club to pay my family's spring training expenses. I'd always take my family and rent a house. Duke Snider and I always shared a house, because we couldn't afford one by ourselves. Buzzy took me around the corner and talked to me. I wanted \$30,000 and he said, "No way, Carl, I can't do that." I said, "Well, that's what I want. Go back and pay Greenberg his ten bucks." Buzzy said, "Let me tell you what. \$28,500 is as high as I can go on your contract. We got other people to take care of too. And we haven't paid a pitcher that much yet." In those days pitchers didn't get paid the same as everyday players. \$28,500," he says, "and let me do some things I don't have to put in your contract, and you won't have to pay taxes on. I'll pay your family's expenses during spring training, that's another \$1000 or \$1500." I said, "Now that's not for one year, Buzzy, because if you agree to do that it's an agreement for good." He said, "That's all right. You bring the family down and we'll take care of them." Then I said,

"I've got some bad teeth, and I'm getting them fixed. I think the club ought to take care of that. How would you like ~~to~~ me to come up in the middle of the year with a sore arm because of an abscessed tooth?" "Oh, God," he says, "how much is that going to be?" "Oh, I don't know," I replied. So he agreed, and I still have some gold inlays in my mouth that were part of my raise in '54.

WL: Interesting. Okay, we come to '51. The famous year.

CE: Infamous year.

WL: Yeah, you had a great season and then you go up against the Giants. And Thomson beats Branca with a home run in the first game, driving in the winning run with a 2-run homer.

CE: That was 3-1? Yeah, Jim Hearn pitched that game against us in Ebbets.

WL: The second game surprised me a bit, inasmuch as Labine was a rookie and had a reliever as much as a starter, but he starts and shuts them out, 10-0.

CE: Well, you say the manager doesn't make much difference if you've got the horses, but the manager has to make some choices, and one of the biggest decisions a manager ever has to make is who to start and when to take him out. That day, Labine and I were good friends, we were kids who grew up together with the Dodgers and we're still very close friends. Clem and I rode together that day on the bus to the Polo Grounds. Dressen had told us, "One of you is going to start. I don't know which one." I don't know what tipped the balance, although I was fighting this arm problem I always had. Dressen, I know, was weighing things like "If he's okay, I'll take Carl, but if he's having one of these bad days or his arm's not loose, I can't gamble." I don't know just what he was thinking, but at least when we got to the park he picked Labine. Couldn't have made a better choice, because Clem had outstanding stuff. We got a lot of runs, and Rube Walker caught that game. Most people don't remember that. Campy was hurt. He had a sore back or something and did not catch the playoffs, or at least the second and third games.

WL: Yeah, Campanella was in the first game, but Walker caught the second and third ones. You're right.

CE: I remember that Rube Walker hit a big, big home run. It went on the roof of the Polo Grounds, one of the few times you ever saw that happen. But Labine's performance that day was just outstanding. And then in the third game, Branca came back after pitching very well in the first game.

WL: Let's get to that third game, which is one of the most sensational games in baseball history. 1-1 till the top of the 8th inning and then the Dodgers get to Maglie for three runs, and it looked like curtains for the Giants, for sure. Newcombe sets them down one, two, three in the 8th.

CE: Two strikeouts.

WL: They tell me, or I read somewhere, that before the ^{ninth} ~~ninth~~ started, Newcombe mentioned to Dressen on the bench, "I may be losing it." I can't guarantee that. That's what I read somewhere. But anyway, he goes out and *gives up* two singles in a row - Mueller hit the second one - and Irvin pops out. Then Lockman doubles and drives in Dark, and Mueller sprains his ankle badly going into third. They take him out and put in a pinch runner. Dressen comes

out and removes Newcombe. Dressen had to make three decisions in that inning, and all of them were crucial in a sense. Should he have started Newcombe in the 9th inning? That's the first one. But on the basis of what he had done up to then, you can't ...

CE: The key there was that he had struck out two ~~key~~ hitters in the 8th inning. That always remained the strong pivotal point so that everybody said "Hey, Newcombe is coming on, he's not losing it."

WL: Yeah. So you can't really argue with Dressen on that. Then he chose Branca. As I recall, Roe and Labine were ^{also} warming up.

CE: No, Branca and Erskine were warming up.

WL: Well, I thought that was true, but in some place I read that Labine was warming up.

CE: Not until Branca went in. Then Labine got up.

WL: Yeah, well, that's too late.

Add #2
+ #3

CE: But, you remember, he'd just pitched nine innings the day before.

WL: Yeah, but anybody can pitch to one batter or two.

CE: It depends.

WL: But one who is a reliever probably should be able to. Which he had been, even if he did pitch a complete game the day before. Anyway, then Branca comes in and faces Thomson, who had beat him in the first game, and Dressen chooses not to walk Thomson, because that would put the winning run on. But Mays was due up after Thomson and was not having a good rookie year. I mean, he hadn't reached anything like the peak he would achieve later. And *Stats =* he wasn't having a good playoff series. Those decisions you can look back on and second-guess.

CE: Well, you have to have a lot of information, which fans and others don't always have and the manager does have. And a lot of things go into the decisions. For instance, I don't recall, but it could be checked, yet there was a ~~time~~ period of time down the stretch when Newcombe pitched with two days of rest on a couple or three occasions.

WL: I know that. He pitched four games in the last ten days, or something like that.

CE: And he kept us in the race. So, Dressen, knowing that, had to be thinking about Newcombe being tired. I don't remember who the two were that he struck out in the 8th inning, but also the two base hits to open the 9th - Dark's and Mueller's - were both routine ground ball outs. But they were "seeing eye" hits. And the old speculation. My good friend Gil Hodges, ^{who was a fantastic fielder,} didn't always go to his right as well as some others. And of course, he was playing near the line to guard against the extra base hit on the ball that Mueller hit. But that's all second-guessing. The key move was when Dressen finally decided to take Newcombe out. He called the bullpen and talked to Clyde Sukeforth. Now, Clyde, one of the outstanding gentlemen in baseball, was a very good baseball man, and what he told Dressen no one could actually hear, because

he was down at the phone and I was on the mound. And Sukey had been warming me up. He said something about "Erskine's bouncing his curve." I had that overhand curve and so forth.

WL: Yeah, I've heard that.

CE: And he said that Branca's throwing well. And Sukey was always aware of my arm problem, and he was very sensitive about it and he understood.

WL: And he didn't want to go to Roe because he was lefthanded.

CE: Right. And Roe wasn't throwing anyway. Roe was not down there. Roe was not in the bullpen. If he was in the bullpen, nobody paid any attention or knew it. Preacher was a good friend of mine, and I do not recall Roe being in the bullpen. Branca and I were up throwing first, and when Branca was called in Labine got up, very stiff from the day before, and started

just to soft toss. So, the first pitch that Ralph threw to Thomason was right in his wheelhouse, exactly where we say don't pitch him. But it had good stuff on it. The second pitch was up and in and Thomson kind of muscled it. The first pitch was where Ralph shouldn't have had it, and the second one was where he wanted it, but Thomson hit this sinking line drive that wouldn't have gone out of any other park in the league, but it did go out of the Polo Grounds. Labine and I were standing on the bullpen mound, watching between each pitch, and I always remember that Labine's comment was, when he saw the ball go out, "I just saw my wallet go over the fence!"

WL: You've been quoted as having made that remark.

CE: One of us said it. I just remember it being said. "There goes the Wallet."

You know, we went stright into the center field clubhouse of the old Polo Grounds. We were the first to be in the clubhouse, Clem and I. And, hurriedly, they're moving the TV cameras across from our side into the Giants' side. They were all set up for the victory celebration. But now the champagne cases were being carried through the door to the Giants' side. Then, when our door was shut, I've never been in a tomb, but I imagine a tomb was not much different than that heavy, heavy silence that we had on our side. And

X the bedlam that was outside. And then I was seated and watched each of our team members come in and looked at their faces and watched what they did. It was a sense of history to me, saying to myself, "This is one of the real dramatic things in baseball." Although I ~~hated~~ hated what happened, I sensed that this was one of the moments. I watched Dressen come in and rip his shirt off. He ripped all the buttons off his shirt.

WL: I don't blame him.

X CE: Robinson had his glove rolled up, and he fired it in his locker. Different guys kicked a stool. There were hardly any words said, though. There was not a lot of screaming, yelling, cussing. And then Branca finally came in and sat down on the steps going up from the locker area into the trainer's room, probably eight or ten steps. Ralph was about midway ~~up~~ up those steps, and he pitched forward, with ~~the~~ his hands down between his shoulders and his shoulders down between his knees. He looked like he was almost in a contorted position, and that big number 13 was shining on his back. All of that just now came back to me, but that was the scene, and it was just unbelievable.

WL: And actually, Ralph was never the same pitcher thereafter.

CE: Well, it's hard to say, you know, they always ~~xxx~~ ^{said} Herb Score was never the same after he got hit, but other things enter in. Ralph had had good years. He was like most of us. How long do you sustain being at your peak? I don't know if Ralph had already peaked when he was real young or what, but he pitched some good baseball after that, though he never had any of his best years after that.

WL: Now, Koufax was up by that time, wasn't he?

CE: No, Koufax came in '55.

WL: All right, in '52 you made it back to first place. In fact, if you had won that thing in '51, you would have been on top about five years out of six.

CE: Yeah. We had a stretch starting in '49 where we could have won maybe 8,9, ~~and~~ pennants in a row.

WL: Right. You had one of the dynasties

CE: Just the bounce of the ball or some peculiar thing.

WL: In '52 you were 14-6 yourself and had a great Series.

CE: Well, it wasn't so great. We didn't win it.

WL: That's right, but

CE: I got to start the second game of that Series and had a peculiar accident just before time to warm up. I went in and pitched anyway, but I had injured my knee in junior high school in basketball. I had a real tender place on the inside, but it never bothered me in baseball. But that day I'm getting ready to start and it was drizzling rain. I had stepped up on a ladder in the clubhouse to look out a small window, just to see if it had stopped. It was about five minutes till one. I already had my glove, my jacket, the ball, everything. I stepped down off the ladder after seeing ~~it~~ ^{the rain} apparently had slackened, and as I turned around I hit the inside of my knee on a heater that was in the trainer's room. I hit the corner of it right on this tender place on my knee. I sat down on the trunk and was rubbing my knee, and I said, "Oh, doggone, I hit that right on it." And I passed out and fell face down on the floor. They revived me, got me up on the table, gave me some smelling salts. About that time Dressen walks in, and here's his starting pitcher, out. So they got me up and I was really okay. And I didn't want to pass up my first start in the World Series. So, he was convinced I was okay, and I started against Raschi that day. I had good stuff.

WL: Yeah, you went five inni~~ngs~~s.

CE: When I came out the score was something like 4-2 or 3-1....

WL: It was 2-1.

CE: 2-1. And then they ended up getting some more runs and we wound up losing to Raschi. But I didn't pitch too badly that day, though I ended up taking the loss.

WL: But in the fifth game you came back to pitch a complete game. What

attracts my attention is that Dressen had a lot faith in you and left you in, even though they all five of their runs in one inning.

CE: The Yankees were so tough, they were tough. But I started that game in Yankee Stadium and had good stuff and was in command. We had a 4-run lead and got to the 5th inning. Of course, you may have heard the story - I won't drag it out - but I got a wire that day and read it in the clubhouse before the game. It was from a friend and said, "Good luck on the 5th game of the World Series on this 5th day of October and congratulations on your 5th wedding anniversary." I said, "Gee, that's interesting." Red Barber read it and said, "Let me have it. I'll take it up to the booth. That's a nice little sidelight." So I forget about it, but in the 5th inning of the game there were a couple of squib hits, then a single and two runs score, and then Mize comes up with two men on and boom, hits one into the seats. In a matter of a few minutes my 4-run disappears and I'm one run behind. And it just devastated me. So Dressen came to the mound and talked to me and left me in the game, to everybody's surprise. Then, from that moment, with two out in the fifth, with Berra the hitter, and he hit a fly ball to right. He hit it pretty well, it was a kind of semi-line drive, but it was an out. Then I thought Dressen would pinch hit for me. But he looked the bench before it was my turn to hit, and he said, "You're it! You're it!" So I hit and stayed in the game. From the time Dressen came to the mound after the home run by Mize, and the game went 11 innings, my roommate Duke Snider singled in the tying run, I think it was in the 7th, and then I think he scored the winning run in the eleventh. Duke always hit well for me.

WL: He always hit well, period.

CE: Nineteen consecutive Yankees went down in order from that moment in the fifth inning through the end of the game. But that was unbelievable. Right in the middle of that string of 19 straight outs, Johnny Sain, who had relieved Ewell Blackwell for the Yankees, hit a ground ball back of second which Robinson fielded, though it was a tough play, and threw to first.

Passarella, who was the umpire, made a call, a very controversial call, as to whether Robinson's throw beat Sain. Pictures later looked pretty much like Sain beat the play. So, Sain was really incensed by that, but we went on to win. The next day he grabbed me under the stands, and he said, "You lucky so-and-so. I don't understand how you can get - you're lucky, you're lucky - I was safe a mile." He was giving me all of this, and I was a young guy then and didn't pop off a lot or anything, but finally he kind of irritated me and I said, "Johnny, you know, Newcombe has a saying that what goes around comes around. Do you remember the game in '48 when Phil Masi got picked off of second base and you beat Feller 1-0? Was Masi out or safe?" That shut Johnny up.

WL: That cost Feller his only chance to win a World Series game.

CE: So I said, "You've got a lot of nerve getting on me, after you beat Feller 1-0 that way."

WL: Well, let's see. In '53 you had your best year. You pitched the opening game of the Series, didn't you?

CE: Dressen told me that I was going to be his three-start pitcher in that Series. "If we go seven games you'll get three starts." We're opening up in Yankee Stadium, and I had a bad first inning. Gee whiz! Disappointing, so disappointing. And of all people, Billy Martin tripled with the bases loaded. And it just made me sick. Well, anyway, the Yankees were tough. Now let me tell you, they had a great team. And to beat those guys it took this superhero effort in 11 innings in the first game. Dressen came to me after the loss in that first game - I wasn't the loser, Labine took the loss - and he said to me, "You've often come back, as ironic as it seems with your arm trouble, but you sometimes come back with less rest than normal and do real well. I'm gonna start you in the third game." So, I was so happy to get a start again so quick that I made up my mind that I was going to pitch the first inning like there was no tomorrow - and the second. I didn't care

about anything except the inning at hand. I was going to go all out. Well, that game I had outstanding stuff, excellent control, and I started mounting some strikeouts, which I wasn't keeping track of, because Raschi was a formidable opponent. They scored a real cheap run off of me, in the fifth. Just two scratch infield hits that got knocked down and the play even could have been made, but Gilliam had a chance on one he knocked down and didn't make the play. It was a tough play. They weren't hit hard, they were just infield scratches. So then they scored and it's 1-1. So we scored one again in the sixth and they came back again. The only ball they hit well that whole game was by Gene Woodling. He hit a line drive/^{single}to center. It was the only well-hit ball, but they scratched out another run and now, it's tied, 2-2.

So, I pitched the 8th and then Campy, who was to be on Edward R. Murrow's TV show that night, and that was the first one. It was going to be the initial show. Well, Murrow had coached Roy on this live presentation they were going to do. He said, "Roy, now this is my first show. The best thing you could do would be to hit a home run ^{tomorrow} ~~today~~ and win the game." Well, Roy in the bottom of the 8th inning, hit one of Raschi's few hanging pitches. He threw a slider and it got inside and Roy hit it in the seats. That gave us a 3-2 lead.

WL: And then in the 9th you got your 14th strikeout against

CE: Well, I pitched against a pinch hitter, Don Bollweg, and struck him out. That tied the record. And then they sent up my nemesis, one of the best hitters I ever faced, Johnny Mize. What I didn't know was that over on the bench Mize had been getting on the Yankee players that day for chasing my curve ball and not laying off my high fastball. Mantle, who struck out four times, Mize was really on him and Joe Collins, who also struck out four times. I didn't know any of this, but the Yankees have since told me that they were just irritated by the way Mize was needling them.. And then Big John - oh, what a tough hitter - and he was a good ball-and-strike man too. He didn't hit at bad pitches, he'd take close pitches for balls, you had to throw him good pitches, and when you did he could hit it out in any direction. Just one

of the toughest hitters in baseball. So now here's big John, and I get two quick strikes on him with curve balls. Then I tried to waste a pitch, and almost made a mistake. I got a high fastball out over the plate. I'm glad it was up and I'm glad it had good stuff on it, for he swung and just fouled it off. And he shook his head, like that was it. And then I came back with another good curve ball and John had a very poor swing. I never saw him swing that way. And it was strike three. So the guys on the Yankees say that when John came back they gave him the silent treatment. But that was unbelievable.

WL: Yeah, I was walking on the Notre Dame campus and heard a radio in some dormitory room say that you had got your 14th strikeout and I remember also being on the Notre Dame campus when I heard Howard Ehmke get his 13th in '29.

CE: One of my thrills was that I was asked to go on the Ed Sullivan show.

I was going to go to T _____ Church for my friend Dr. Peale on

X Sunday night, and Ed Sullivan sent word over he'd like me to be on his show. I said, "Well, I'd like to, but unless I can be on real early.." He said, "I'll put you on early." So I went over and just to be introduced ^{from} ~~to~~ the audience. It was a live show in those days and they didn't take many liberties, because they had to be right on time. I stood up and he said, "A young man who pitched so-and-so yesterday" and finally, just impromptu, X he said, "Come up here." I want to tell you people something about this young man. The only way we could get him was to have him put on first, because he wants to go to Dr. Peale's church tonight." But on my way back down the aisle a hand came out and stopped me. It was Connie Mack. Mr. Mack was there X and he said, in the very strained voice he had in the later years of his life, "Young man, I want to congratulate you on the greatest game I ever saw pitched. I was the manager who put Howard Ehmke in the lineup, and I remember the day I surprised everybody by starting him." I thought that was one of the real bonuses to have Mr. Mack present and stop me and talk to me.

WL: Absolutely. Now, quickly, just a few more things. What was the trouble with Karl Spooner? He started so brilliantly. Did he ruin his arm?

CE: Well, Karl Spooner had one of these fabulous arms, with an easy delivery, and the ball just jumped or telescoped into the hitter. Just a fabulous fastball. When he started in the big leagues he struck out - what? 27 or 28 guys in the first two games. Well, that was right at the end of the season of '54. We didn't win the pennant that year, the Giants won it. So, the Dodgers had very little to ballyhoo about all winter, and so King Karl Spooner was a hot number they could talk about. By the time we got to spring training, Spooner had been well publicized. We were in Miami, playing our exhibition games in the spring. Spooner was to follow Podres in a spring game in which each pitcher was only going to pitch three innings. Podres pitched the first two innings and came to the bench and told Alston, "I'm a little tender. This is my first outing. I think maybe two will be enough for me today." So Alston sent word quickly to the bullpen to get Spooner ready. Karl got up to throw, and we made three quick outs. A very fast half inning. Now they bring Spooner in and he's not ready. The announcer said, "Now pitching for the Dodgers, King Karl Spooner, the strikeout rookie, blah, blah." And Spooner wanted to throw the ball right through the backstop. And he hurt his arm. Unlike my injury, he never was able to throw again. The fortunate part about my arm was there were times when I could get my stuff back and pitch. But Spooner never was able to get that back.

WL: That's a shame. There are so many cases like that.

CE: Yeah, a lot of guys you never heard about had great chances... The Dodgers had so many... Rex Barney could have been one of the all-time pitchers, but had arm trouble. Jack Banta, another one.

WL: In '55 the Dodgers came back to win the pennant again, and it was THE year, because that time you didn't fool around. You took the Series.

CE: Yeah, we got off to a great start, got out in front of the league and stayed there all year.

WL: Tell me about your one home run.

CE: Ha! Thank you for asking. I roomed with Duke Snider and he hit about 40 every year. I'd see Duke strike out three times, then hit one in the seats and be the hero. I used to kid. I'd say, "Duke, I'm telling you, I pitch and work ~~hard~~ hard nine innings sometimes to win a game, sometimes no decision, and you home run hitters with one swing can turn the whole game around. I'll make you a ten dollar bet. I'll bet you before my career is over, even I'll hit a home run, just to show you how easy it is. But I bet you never pitch a shutout." So we kidded about that. And then ~~against~~ ^{against} the Cubs ~~and~~ in New York, I guess Sam Jones was pitching, we had the lead and ended up winning the game, 7-0. But some time during the middle of the game, I never could figure this out, Sam Jones threw hard, with a wicked curve ball. But he never threw me his curve ball. He couldn't believe that he couldn't throw his fastball by me. I wasn't too bad a hitter, I wasn't a great hitter, but I used to just swing level and try to make contact. Well, I hit some shots off him before, I'd had base hits off of Sam Jones, but this time I hit a line drive to left center over the 376 mark. The ball just jumped into the stands. So I circled the bases and I have a picture at home that somebody took of me showing me going into the dugout. Every body in the whole picture, including people in the stands, are laughing. I mean, everybody's got a big smile on his face. That's just the way I felt.

WL: Roger Craig was with you that year.

CE: Roger Craig. You bet. He and Don Bessent came up the same ^{day,} pitched in a doubleheader and pitched two complete games that we won.

WL: Can you beat that? That's probably a ...

CE: Two minor league pitchers, joined us ~~the~~ same day, both pitched, both won complete games.

WL: I doubt that that's been ~~none~~ equalled.

CE: That's the way I remember it.

WL: That '55 Series has to be one of your best thrills, isn't it?

CE: Well, we were so frustrated, having been in those Series with the Yankees. I was there in '49, '52, '53, and now '55. Of course, we got off to a poor start, as I remember, in '55. Seems like we lost the first two games. Maybe it was '53 when we lost the first two. At any rate, it went down to the seventh game, ~~and~~ as always with the Yankees. You never blew the Yankees out. I was very tense, although I was on the bench that day, with Podres pitching. And pitching well. I'll tell you where I thought the game turned around. Every bounce of the ball had always seemed to go for the Yankees, the way it always was. There was a play late in the game in which Rizutto was sliding into third, I guess he was stealing third, and a ~~battin~~^{ed} ball hit him, and he was out. And I said, "That's the thing that happens to us. This may be different." And sure enough, we were able to hang on, and Podres pitched a brilliant game.

WL: Yeah, Podres was the hero. What about Larson's perfect game?

CE: Well, in the 7th inning of that game somebody on the bench said, "You know, we haven't had a base runner yet." It was the first time I think any of us realized that there was a perfect game going. And Maglie had pitched very well that day. Allowed five hits, I think. So we were not really into the perfect game bit until about the last two innings. And then, of course, we just watched it finish up ~~and~~ in disbelief. I saw where Dale Mitchell passed away.

WL: Yes.

CE: A fine person. Outstanding player.

WL: And he was probably right that last pitch was a ball, but he shouldn't have taken it.

CE: That's always going to be discussed but ...

WL: Babe Pinelli is gone

CE: Babe Pinelli. It was his last call in the big leagues. He retired after that Series. Well, it wasn't his last call. It was his last call behind the plate, I think. But Pinelli had been a good umpire. And a

fine person. Whether it was a ball or strike, at this point in time is rather incidental. We thought at the time the ball was high and outside, but one pitch... of course, that changes the game around many times. So there were no sour grapes over that. They respected the fact that Larson had done something unbelievable.

WL: Well, now, one or two more questions. In '56 you had another 7-game Series with the Yankees. That's the one we're talking about when ^{Larson} pitched the perfect game. And Newcombe had some more tough luck.

CE: That's the Series where I mentioned Berra's foul tip, which he couldn't quite hold and which would have struck Berra out. It gave Berra that little tiny glimpse of ~~right~~ life. He hit the next pitch, which was over his head, and hit it into Bedford Avenue.

WL: How did you guys feel about the move to L.A.?

CE: You know, we were players, and we didn't feel much except what we read in the papers and heard in rumors about the team possibly moving. We knew Mr. O'Malley was trying to get another stadium. We went to Jersey City and played a few games in Roosevelt Stadium. He tried to get the city fathers to build one in Villa Park in Brooklyn near ~~the~~ what is now a railroad terminal, and Robert Moses, as I understand it, was opposed to it, and the city fathers did not permit it. So, Mr. O'Malley was then romanced by Los Angeles, and we couldn't believe that we were going to move to L.A. Until it was really announced. But we knew something was going to happen, because Ebbets Field was really an old park, there were changes in baseball, Mr. O'Malley was really a progressive thinker, and he wanted a fine, modern stadium. When he couldn't get it there, the pioneering spirit of being the first on the west coast. For people now it's really hard to remember, but baseball then only went as far as St. Louis to the west. And you only had eight teams in each league. So baseball needed expansion.

WL: It did. So he seized the moment and conned Stoneham into going out there. And O'Malley took the plum and gave Stoneham Candlestick.

CE: Well, nobody knew where the plum was, exactly. Mr. O'Malley got a site near the interchanges of all the freeways, while Candlestick is 20 miles outside of San Francisco. L.A. weather is far different than San Francisco for baseball. I don't know, it was a gamble for both of them, but I thought the location of the Giant team at Candlestick was a very big disadvantage.

WL: They tell me that a political move. You didn't see last night's game on TV, did you? The Cubs were palying in Candlestick and the announcers said it was the worst they had ever seen the wind in Candlestick. It blew Mike LaCoss' cap from the mound all the way to the right wnter field fence.

CE: Yeah, that's not necessarily Candlestick, that's any place in Frisco. But Candlestick for the fan, to have to drive that far, that's inconvenient, I always thought was a big negative. Now, when the Giants are going good, people don't have too much trouble finding it. But you have to sustain good attendance even in your mediocre years.

WL: Well, in '59 you retired early in the season?

CE: Mid-season. June 15.

WL: You just missed another World Series.

CE: Well, I stayed on as a coach, but I wasn't eligible for the Series.

But I got a share of the Series/^{money}that year and I got a World Series ring.

My arm had reached the point where I could throw, but I couldn't rest between innings and come back.

WL: So, Larry Sherry was the hero that year, unexpectedly, I think.

CE: When I retired on June 15, there were several players not on the roster who were the World Series heroes. Roger Craig replaced me on the roster and won 11 games the balance of the season. Maury Wills had just come up and he hadn't learned to hit lefthanded yet. I pitched hours of batting practice to Maury to get him to hit through the ball lefthanded. He was very strong in the Series. Larry Sherry was in the minors. Frank Howard was in the minors. They acquired Churck Essghian somewhere along the way. I can't remember when he came. The guys that won the Series were not in spring training with us.

WL: Well, Duke hit a few in the Series.

CE: Yeah, but I mean we had other people. But, if you'll recall, ^{one} ~~only~~ of the only times I ever remember that Duke Snider was taken out for a pinch hitter was in that Series. They put Churck Essegian and he hit a home run.

WL: I knew he hit a home run as a pinch hitter, but I didn't remember who he replaced.

CE: I think you'll find it was Duke Snider.

WL: You know, I appreciate this, Carl, and I must tell you that I've talked to a lot of old-timers now but I think you are the most articulate and interesting person I've talked with.

CE: Walter, I probably talk too much and in too much detail. But I felt so privileged to be selected. Here I'm ^{just} a little kid here in Anderson, Indiana, and I grew up and got picked out to go to New York and be on that team with great Hall of Fame players. But all the time I was there, you know, I made friends with everybody - clubhouse people, bellboys around the league, special cops that worked the ball parks, people wouldn't know their names, but they're all part of the game. Trainers that I got to know, hotel managers, just all kinds of people that are on the scene but are not in the headlines. And to this day I see and hear from neighbors in Brooklyn where we lived, Los Angeles. People will come through a city, and there'll be a hotel manager still in the business or something, and when they sign in from Anderson, Indiana, and he asks, "Oh, you know Carl Erskine?" That to me was one of the real beautiful dividends.

WL: Right. Should be. But it isn't for everybody. Takes a person sensitive to that situation and all those other people to make that sort of move.

CE: You know who was like that? Waite Hoyt. Did you ever know him?

WL: Yes. I corresponded with him, but he died before I got to talk with him.

CE: Waite Hoyt was so grateful for all the contacts and friends he had in baseball.

WL: Yeah, I listened to him broadcast the Reds' games for years.

CE: When I see a book and it has all of the greats in it, and somewhere in there I'll get a mention or even maybe a picture, I had some good days but I didn't have a Hall of Fame career. But just to be in the majors and be a part of baseball has - still, I just pinch myself.

WL: So many of them have told me that, and so many of the ones I've talked with were from small towns. And they all had that appreciation of having made it when as a kid they hardly could even dream of it.

CE: Right. And then the fans, of course, make the whole thing. The people like yourself who are interested and keep the games alive, who write and do all the things to sustain it. My wife shakes her head and says, "Carl, you know, you pitched those games ~~some~~ thirty-some years ago. I can't believe people still want to talk about it." And I say that in some ways they are more vivid now than when they happened.

WL: Yeah, and there's a spirit of nostalgia abroad in the country in these last few years.

CE: So I feel fortunate, and when guys tell me, "Oh, Carl, there were real ball players in your day. You guys played for the love of the game, and you were great." I love to hear that. I don't believe it but...

WL: I believe it.

CE: I think now you've got a great group of young superstars' talents. Oh, you've got a few bad actors in anything. But generally the 600 plus major league players today are class.

WL: I agree. Did you fellows feel that Roger Kahn did real justice to you in The Boys of Summer?

CE: Well, there were some differences of opinion about the book. Roger wrote it from his own perspective and in his own feel, which he should have. And it ~~it~~ was almost an autobiography. Most of the guys appreciate that somebody captured that era and that's what he did. ~~in The Boys of Summer~~ And The Boys of Summer title was appropriate. Roger was very impressed with me but shouldn't have been. I was in England last year and I went to Westminster Abbey. And

in there is the grave of Dylan Thomas, whose line Roger picked out saying "I see the boys of summer." I wrote Roger from England and said, "I've visited the grave and felt a very special feeling about how all that fit together. And Roger replied, "Gee, for a dumb ball player, ^{Carl} ~~Roger~~, that was pretty good."

WL: Did you leave baseball in '59?

CE: I stayed until the end of the season, and then - in fact, the final act of mine in baseball was to attend a victory party in Chicago at the end of the World Series. I went with the team and we had a big blowout celebrating the win over the White Sox. I told everybody goodbye right there. Went straight down to Indiana.

WL: When did you get into the banking business?

CE: I came home in 1960. By '63 I had coached a little at Anderson College, the local college here, and was selling insurance to make a living. The new little bank, the First National Bank, came from out in the county and moved into the county seat here at Anderson. It was a very small country bank and had come into this town. They asked me to serve on their Board of Directors, since they had no local director. So, I went on the Board of the bank and from that point on began to be more interested in the growth of the bank and development. I was out of the street a lot and knew a lot of people and promoted the bank. And so I came inside twelve years or so ago as a full-time officer. By another unbelievable set of events, five years ago the Board talked to me about taking the presidency of the bank. I said I didn't necessarily have that as a goal and didn't know if that was appropriate. They said they thought it was. Because in this community and area I have represented the bank principally, since we have a lot of out-of-town directors. I said, "If I fit the role and handle the role, well, you'll have to be the judge of that." I became president of the bank, then, about 4-1/2 years ago.

WL: Great. My father was banker. I'm from Texas.

CE: Well, we have a fine bank and I had a meeting just before you came in -28-
with our team, which I look at just the same way as I did the Dodgers. We
have specialists at every base, and without them my performance wouldn't mean
anything.

WL: Right. You're like the manager.

CE: In baseball I was a pitcher, started the game, and was a necessary part,
but Hodges, Robinson, Reese, ~~Frankie~~ Furillo, Snider, Campy - those guys made
it for me.

WL: What's the population of Anderson now?

CE: 65,000. It's really shrunk a little bit during the last 7-8 years.

WL: You'd rank in the top 10 in the state, wouldn't you?

CE: Uh, maybe not, but we'd be close. We're called 2nd class by size,
but Anderson is a strong General Motors town, and we're in a strong farming
community, so we're kind of in on both sides of it.

WL: Thank you very much, Carl.

CE: Walter, you're a pleasure to talk with, and I appreciate your interest
in baseball.

WL: I wish we had 3-4 hours. We could go on and on. There are a lot of
things you never get around to in an hour, but this has been wonderful.

Thank you.