

Bill Schlesinger

Interview done July 23, 2003

Bill Nowlin [BN]: You were born in the Cincinnati area. In the city itself.

Bill Schlesinger [BS]: Yeah. 1941. But my name's not Rudy. That's a nickname. William C. William Cordes. Rudy? That's a slang word. When I was playing, when somebody would get mad, when he was always upset about striking out, breaking up water coolers, breaking up bats and all that - they would always say that you're a red-ass. They just called me Rudy Redass. I didn't care what they called me.

BN: You're in the books as Rudy.

BS: It says Rudy, I know [laughs], but they never called me Rudy. Never. Somebody, just maybe one team, one year, they gave me that name, you know, but as you change teams, that goes away. I would get really mad sometimes. No, I didn't break any water coolers. I was breaking bats. I would get mad and I was real moody, and I wouldn't talk to anybody for a day or whatever, you know. When you go into a slump, some hitters can handle it but I just couldn't. I couldn't figure out why I couldn't hit these guys. When you play every day, it's not too difficult to go 2 or 3 for 30. It's just easy. You can't explain it. But on the other hand, when you're hot and when you're hitting, the baseball looks like a basketball and everything is going right. No matter where you hit it, it drops in. You just can't wait to play. That's another thing you can't explain - those hot streaks - because you're not doing anything different. It just happens. Slumps and hot streaks. I would get so upset when I was in these slumps. The same pitchers that I was hitting a month ago, and I can't hit 'em now. I couldn't figure it out, and it was frustrating and I would get mad.

BN: What age were you when you first got interested in baseball?

BS: I started playing baseball when I was four. And I played every day. Hardball. I was born in '41. I started playing in '44 or '45 when I was 3 or 4 years old. My mom and dad got me started. See, back then we couldn't even get on a diamond - on these playfields - because these playfields were just packed. Today, they're vacant. Nobody's around. It's like night and day.

We couldn't even get on the field and we had to wait and wait. But I was playing baseball all day long every day including Sunday during the summer.

BN: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

BS: I've got a sister. She's ten years older than me. It was my dad and my mom. My dad had to work. He had a retail hardware store, and that's what this is [where I am now, doing this interview.] This is my dad's business. My dad passed away in '72. I've been here since '72. I just got done playing ball two years before that. I got hurt. I got hit in the face by a pitched ball. It was about the same injury as Tony Conigliaro, but Tony's was a little bit worse. I lost 40% of my vision, permanently. It's the same today as it was when I got hit, 30 years ago. I lost 100% for about three or four days.

I'm in a book written by Frank Dolson. Do you know him? It's called *Beating the Bushes*. He's got about two or three pages on me in there. Dolson and I became good friends when I was with

the Phillies. He was the head of the sports department for the Philadelphia Inquirer. I met him in Spring training in 1970. That was the year after I got hit. He was really a special guy.

BN: Your parents had you out there....

BS: Back to that, yeah. My dad had a baseball and a glove on me when I was 3 or 4, because my dad was involved in baseball also. He wasn't a scout or anything like that, but he knew a lot of baseball players. Through the Shrine. I'm a Shriner, but my dad was a big Shriner and every year at Crosley Field - where the Reds played - they had Shrine Night once a year, and my dad was head of that Shrine Night. That's how he met all of these players, all the Reds players.

When I was 7 or 8 years old, I always came in the hardware store after school, and he had guys in here working in the hardware store during the winter.

BN: Back when players needed work.

BS: Yeah. They needed another job, some of them did. Ted Kluszewski, he was in here, working here. Roy McMillan. Johnny Temple was in here. Gus Bell. These guys were in here, but especially Kluszewski because he was a monster and I was a real tiny kid. I couldn't wait to get out of school to come up here and see these guys. That was a big thrill.

BN: Probably a thrill for some of your friends, too.

BS: Oh sure. I brought my friends in here. It was a good time.

BN: So that helped inspire you also, to want to play yourself?

BS: Oh, yeah. Yeah. But my career in baseball is very, very unusual.

BN: You were a few years before Little League really got established.

BS: Yeah, I didn't play Little League. I played in the Knothole. After that, when I was 16 or 17, I went out for the high school team I got cut there. I wasn't good enough. I just wasn't good enough. No excuses. And then I went to the University of Cincinnati for two years, and I got cut there, too.

BN: What was your position back then? Did you have one?

BS: First base. I played first base. That's the only position I played. Then after that when I was 19 or 20, I was playing in this beer league. It was on Sunday and it was a bunch of old guys in their 30s. If you're in your 30s and 40s, that's old. These guys were drinking better on the bench and they were just having a good time and I was about 19 or 20. That was the only thing around, so I played in this league on Sunday afternoons once a week.

One of my dad's friends, his name was Pat Patterson and he was a scout for the Yankees. He would come in the hardware store almost every day and we would go to lunch. After high school, I was up here helping my dad. Me and Pat Patterson and my dad and a sportswriter for the Cincinnati Enquirer whose name was Lou Smith - he would come in here all the time - so the four of us would go to lunch. And we would go to Ted Kluszewski's restaurant, which was a few miles from my dad's hardware store. We would go to lunch almost every day and we would talk about baseball.

So Pat Patterson, who was a scout for the Yankees, and he played for the Yankees back in the 20s and 30s [in the majors, only in 1921 - though he did hit .400], he was a very good friend of my dad, and I loved Pat. He was always talking to me about baseball. I guess one day when I was 20, I said, "Pat, I want to play professional baseball." He said, "You do?" And he took it very serious. My dad just laughed and he said, "Yeah, OK." My mom, she took it more serious than my dad. My mom said, "Well, if you want to try that, that's fine, but how's it going to happen?"

So Pat, when he was down at our house for dinner one night - I know Pat had something to do with this - I guess the Yankees weren't too interested in even looking at me - but he did have a friend and his name was Denny Galehouse and he was a pitcher for the Red Sox in the 1940s.

BN: He was. He pitched a very famous game.

BS: He did?

BN: He pitched the playoff game in 1948.

BS: He did? {laughs}

BN: The single-game playoff where the Indians won it. The last game of the season.

BS: I didn't know that. My first year was '64, so this was like '62, and I was playing in that Sunday league and I didn't see anybody...there might have been some scouts there. We had a few young players there. My age, but they were pitchers. They weren't looking at me, that's for sure, because I really wasn't that good. I had a lot of power and speed but that's about it. Power and speed together is kind of unusual. There aren't too many players that have that. Even today. Barry Bonds was one of them.

Then, I guess, is the spring of '63, Pat said, "Look, why don't you just go down to Florida and go to one of these baseball schools for a month?" Those baseball schools are kind of like a racket; they just want your money. I think it cost like three or four hundred dollars to go down there. They give you a place to stay. So I did that with a friend of mine. There were hundreds of guys down there. Most of them weren't very good. We had a good time for a month and then I came home after that in the spring of '63. Then I started playing in that Sunday league.

I guess it was in August of '63 this man walks in the hardware store and it was Denny Galehouse. I didn't know who it was. He said, "Are you so-and-so?" and I said I was, and he said, "Well, I'm Denny Galehouse and I'm a scout for the Red Sox." I said, "Yeah." He said, "Is your dad here?" I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Well, let's go back in your office about something." And I said, "OK."

So we're back here in the office talking to my dad, and Denny Galehouse is standing there and I'm thinking, "Man, what does this guy want?" He's looking at my dad and he says, "We're interested in having your son play professional baseball with the Red Sox and we're in a position to offer him one thousand dollars for a bonus."

Now, to me, in 1963, a thousand dollars was like a million. I'd never seen a thousand dollars in my life. And my dad says, "Well, you know what? There's some other teams interested in my son." Which was the biggest lie he ever told. And he said, "We have to think this over." Denny Galehouse KNEW that he was the only one, but he played along with my dad. He didn't want to embarrass him or anything like that, so he played along with him and said, "OK, I understand. This is a big decision. How about if I give you two weeks and you think this over?" My dad said, "Yeah. Two weeks is good. We'll give you an answer in two weeks." So Denny Galehouse says, "OK. I'll check back with you in two weeks. I'll come back in two weeks." And he left.

I looked at my dad , and I said, "What are you trying to do?" I said, "You just ruined my life! That's what you did."

He said, "No, no, no, no. Don't get upset. You gotta make them think that other people are interested. You gotta play hard to get." I said, "Dad. He's never coming back."

So the next two Sundays, I was looking around for this guy. I think I struck out three times one week and then the next time I struck out three more times. 0-for-4, 0-for-4 and I made some errors at first base. I thought, "Well, I hope this guy isn't here because if he is, I don't think he's EVER coming back."

But he kept his word and he came back exactly two weeks later and he says to my dad, "Well, have you made a decision?" My dad says, "Well, you know, it's been a really hard decision but we've decided that we're going to sign with you. [laughs]

BN: He didn't ask for \$1500, then?

BS: [laughs more] Right! No. Oh my God, if he would have said that....

Pat Patterson came to see me at the Sunday league twice that summer, like in June or July. I think Pat told Denny what was going on with me, because I did have some good games when Pat came. Pat came because we took him, with my dad. We went together and we came home together, so I know for sure Pat was there.

BN: So you had some power back then? It wasn't just singles, it was extra base hits?

BS: I had lots of power when I was playing baseball here. Lots of power, and I could run. I had good speed. But those were the only two things I had. I had trouble catching the ball at first base. I didn't know how to throw.

BN: Well, the Red Sox had Dick Stuart on the team at the time....

BS: [laughs]

BN: He was there in '63 and '64, so they would have been familiar with a guy...I don't know how fast he was. He wasn't very fast, but he...

BS: Well, Ted Williams told me in spring training...he was our hitting instructor in the spring of '65, when I trained with the Red Sox. That's the first time I met him; he was in spring training for about a month. Those guys never stay for the whole spring training. He was there for about a month and that was the greatest month I've ever had to spend in my life. I'm talking to God, you know!

Anyway, Ted Williams always said, "If you can hit...hitting a baseball is the hardest thing to do in any sport in the world. Just hitting a baseball, that part of baseball, is the hardest thing to do in any sport." He said, "If you can do that...." He had a saying.. He said, "Guys with good gloves, I can shake them out of trees like leaves. But good hitters, they're hard to come by." He said, "If you can hit, somebody'll always find a place for you to play. If you can hit." That's kind of true.

BN: So this was around of August of '63? [meaning the signing]

BS: August of '63. Denny Galehouse came in the hardware store.

BN: What's the name of the hardware store?

BS: It's Pleasant Ridge Hardware. Two words. That's the name of this little community here that's a suburb of Cincinnati. It's in the city of Cincinnati, but it's a suburb.

BN: What was your father's name?

BS: Alvin. A-L-V-I-N.

BN: How far was it from the store to Crosley Field?

BS: It's maybe 20 minutes. Crosley Field was in downtown.

BN: So what did you do between August '63 and spring training '65, then?

BS: My first year in the minor leagues was in '64.

BN: Did you go anywhere that fall ['63] or did you wait until the spring?

BS: I waited until the spring.

BN: Did you train with the big league club?

BS: No, I went with the minor leagues, in Ocala, Florida.

BN: Because the big league club at that time was out in Scottsdale.

BS: Yeah, at that time it was in Scottsdale. That's where I went in '65.

BN: But '64, you went to Ocala, then. What team did you end up with?

BS: Oh my God....well....

BN: So you had never played organized ball?

BS: No, this was the first time. From August to September or whenever I signed that contract...I asked Denny Galehouse, "Are you really going to give me a thousand dollars? For nothing?" He said, "Yeah, we're going to send you a thousand dollars in two weeks." And I got it. And then they started sending me these contracts around Christmas, and Pat Paterson told me how to do these contracts.

He said, "Now, listen, the first contract you get, don't sign it. Send it back and tell them you want more." I said, "WHAAT?" He said, "No, no, no. This is the way you do it."

I think the first contract they sent me was \$350 a month for the next year, and he said, "Send it back." He said, "Just send it back. Tell them you're not satisfied with that figure. But don't mention a figure. Just send it back and say you're not satisfied."

So I said, "Pat, they're going to release me!" He said, "No, they're not. No, they're not."

So I sent it back and the next one was \$450, and Pat said, "Send it back." And I said, "Pat, do you know what you're talking about here?" He says, "I know what I'm talking about." So I said,

"OK...." and I sent it back and I said I'm still not satisfied with this amount. So the next one came and it was \$500 a month, and Pat said, "Sign it."

I signed it for \$500 a month and then from December to March - I had to be there March 1 - for those three months - December, January and February - I had people coming in the hardware store telling me that I was going to go down there for a month's vacation and then I'd be right back home because I had no chance. And my dad was telling me that, too, but my mom was not telling me that.

And by the way, my mom...my dad had to work all day long, so when I was 4 and 5 and 6 years old, my mom was the one who went out to the park. Elizabeth. My mom just passed away last September. 94 years old and 44 weeks, to the day. She just passed away last September and I'm still struggling with it. We were very, very close. She's the one who would hit me fly balls and toss with me, when I was 4 and 5 - under 10 years old.

These people were telling me that I had no chance, and I was starting to believe that I had no chance. So I go on the plane on March 1 and the first guy I met was Carmen Fanzone. He played with the Red Sox [in 1970.] He signed with the Red Sox. He comes from Detroit and we were on the same plane. He played 3 or 4 years with the Cubs. But anyway Carmen was the first guy I met. We went to Ocala together and I think we roomed together. The next day we go to the ballpark. There was 3000 players there - three thousand. From Mexico, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, all over the United States. 3000. In the minor league system then, I think there might have been two teams in Triple A and, I think, 4 or 5 teams in Double A and 4 or 5 teams in A. They were all Red Sox. There was probably 10 or 11 or 12 teams in the minor leagues for the Red Sox at that time.

BN: Did you have four-digit numbers on your back?

BS: No, [laughs] no. If there was like 12 teams and each team, there was going to be 25 players to a team, at most, that would be like 300 positions at the most. And there was, I know there was at least 1000 there, and probably more like 2000 or 3000.

Anyway. Every morning we were told to look on the board on the wall of the clubhouse. It was in alphabetical order and they said, if your name's on this, you go straight to the office and they'll give you a plane ticket back home. That's the first thing I looked at and I just kept looking at that list, and that list was a giant list. I just kept worrying that my name was going to be on there.

The first spring training was really funny. It was a six weeks deal, I guess. Our first game in the minor leagues was maybe April 10. Minor leaguers start later than the major leagues. I signed as a first baseman, and we worked out for many four days. Then the fifth day, then we started to hit. The first four days we just did exercises and then we tossed, but no hitting until maybe the fifth day. So then I started hitting, and I was hitting really well. I was hitting long balls and stuff like that, but at first base I couldn't catch the ball. They would hit me ground balls and I would either fumble it or muff it or it would go through my legs or whatever. I just couldn't catch the ball. I couldn't throw too well, either. After another week, one of the managers came up to me - his name was Larry Thomas. He was the guy I played for. He came up and said, "Now, listen. You have two choices here. You can go to the outfield, or you can go home." I said, "Well, I'll play outfield." He says, "I don't think you can play first base." I said, "I've never played in the outfield before." He said, "That's all right." I kept hitting really well, but they weren't throwing any breaking balls, either. They were just throwing fast balls. I was still hitting them like 400 feet, you know. Hitting line shots all over the place, but I couldn't catch the ball.

Our spring training was over every day around 3 o'clock and these managers - there was at least two or three - everybody else was gone. Everybody left at 3 o'clock, but they kept me after. They

kept me out there until it almost got dark. Until about 7 o'clock. They said, "You don't mind if you stay late, do you?" And I said, "God, no. I don't mind."

BN: Were you working on hitting then, or mostly on fielding?

BS: Fielding. Yeah. They were hitting 1000 fly balls. They were hitting me ground balls. They were teaching me how to throw the ball. How to hold the ball when I threw it. Thousands and thousands a day. Finally I was learning how to play the outfield. learning how to throw, which base to throw it and stuff like that.

BN: Did they have a guy out there with you? And somebody else hitting the fungoes?

BS: Yeah, they had a kid...I don't know who the guy hitting the balls was, but they had managers out there in the outfield with me. There was always at least two minor league managers there, and I was the only one there, so I thought, "Well, I don't know if this was good or bad....: I guessed it was good.

BN: They wouldn't have you doing all that...They wouldn't be doing that work with you if they weren't interested.

BS: Right. My dad...I would call home every night, and my dad would keep asking, "You're not on the list?" And I said no. He was worried about that list. This went on and then another week later, we started playing games against college teams, like the University of Florida, Miami.

BN: BY that time, how big was the squad?

BN: Well, it was down to maybe a thousand. Cut it in half. I was playing left field. I was doing OK. I wasn't making too many errors. I still messed up a little bit, though, you know, but I was getting better and better as time went on.

I just wish one time before I die that they win it all. They haven't won it all since 1918. 1909? 1918!

BN: So you made it to the end? Obviously they kept dropping people and dropping people, and you stayed on.

BS: So with about three days to go in spring training - this was like the sixth week - this manager named Larry Thomas came up, and another manager came up. I can't think of his name. This other guy - the other manager - his team was going to be in Waterloo, Iowa, the Midwest League. Class A. Larry Thomas, his team was in Wellsville, New York, which was the New York/Pennsylvania League. That's the smallest town in organized baseball - it was at the tie. Eight thousand people were in that town. So Larry's standing there and this other manager's standing there, and they said, "You have two choices - Waterloo, Iowa or Wellsville, New York" and I said, "I don't care. I really don't care as long as I get to play." Those two guys started a little argument in front of me. Larry, I guess, won out and said, "Well, I really want him to come to Wellsville, because we need a left fielder" and all of that. So that's where I went. I went to Wellsville, New York. Larry Thomas was the manager, and at that time he was only 23. He had played one year with the Red Sox in the minor leagues. I guess they released him.

The Wellsville Red Sox. At home, in that Sunday league, I was hitting home runs. In spring training, I was hitting 400-foot shots every day. I hit a lot of home runs in spring training. So now the season starts and I probably went a month and I was hitting singles and doubles, and a lot of stolen bases, but no home runs. I was hitting a lot of home runs in batting practice but when the

bell rang - when the game started - it was singles and doubles. I was hitting about .350 and so I thought, "Well, you know what? I'm going to be a singles and doubles hitter. That's what I'm going to be." So I just forgot about home runs. I didn't even think about them. They'd just come. If you try to hit a home run, it's impossible. They just come natural. So about a month into the season, I hit my first home run and I ended up hitting 37. And 45 stolen bases, and I hit .350.

BN: Were you a pull hitter mostly?

BS: Yeah, pull hitter. But I was a fastball hitter mostly and I couldn't hit breaking stuff. That was a big problem. It was the first time I'd seen that kind of stuff. The year before that, in 1963, Tony Conigliaro played there [Wellsville] and he had about the same kind of year I did. In 1964 Tony was in the big leagues. He went from Wellsville to Boston. I played in Wellsville in '64 and the same thing happened, and they didn't know what to do. I kind of surprised them and I surprised myself. I was there the whole year but they didn't know what to do with the contract deal.

I came home and Pat Patterson said, "Well, you had a good year." I said, "Yeah, Pat. What's going to happen now?" He said, "I don't know. Let's just wait and see what kind of contract they send you." They sent me a major league contract. Back then - I don't know if it's that way today - if at the end of that year, the Red Sox had sent me a Class A contract, I could have been taken by any other organization - in both leagues - if they would have given me a contract higher than the one the Red Sox gave me. Like if the Red Sox sent me a Class A contract, I could have been taken by any other organization if that other organization would have sent me a Double A contract.

The only way the Red Sox could protect me was to give me the highest contract possible, which was the major league contract. There was nothing above that. If they would have given me a Triple A contract, another organization could have given me a major league contract - but there's no way in the world I was ready to play in the major leagues then. It was the 40-man roster, so I was one of the 40.

BN: They obviously thought highly of you to put you in that group of 40. You might have been #39 or #40, but nonetheless....

BS: The 40-man roster, there's 15 guys in the minor leagues who have major league contracts. So, when they sent me that, when they sent me a major league contract, around Christmas, Pat says, "Wow. They're giving you a major league contract." So I says, "OK, what do I do?" They were offering me something like \$3000 a month, instead of \$500, and Pat said, "Send it back." "Pat! This is three thousand a month!" "Send it back." So I did the same thing. Sent it back. They sent me another one for \$3500.00. He said, "Send it back." I said, "OK." So the same game was played. The third one, they sent me was \$4000 a month so I signed it and I went to Scottsdale. There was 40 guys there. That was nice, to go to spring training with 40. Billy Herman was the manager. I got to meet all these guys. All my heroes.

BN: They had a guy named Yastrzemski playing left field.

BS: Yeah, Yaz was there. That was a big thrill. Pumpsie Green and Conigliaro in the outfield. And Frank Malzone. Mike Andrews, I think, at second base.

BN: That year they had Schilling.

BS: Oh yeah, it was Chuck Schilling. In spring training it was Schilling. I got the wrong year. Jimmy Piersall was playing center field, I remember that. He was playing with the Angels. He was a good fielder. Didn't he play with the Red Sox?

BN: He did, in the 50s.

B S: Jimmy Piersall could flat out play. He was good. I get there, and Ted Williams...my clubhouse guy, he got in a little trouble a few years ago messing with little kids, I think....

BN: Yeah, Donnie Fitzpatrick.

BS: Donnie Fitzpatrick. He was my best friend. This guy was a super guy. He took care of me. He was showing me the ropes. He just hung out with me all the time. I wouldn't even dream of him doing something like this.

BN: The whole thing's over. He was convicted.

BS: He'd been with the Red Sox since he was 10 years old. He was the batboy or something, with the Red Sox his whole life. That's where I met Fitzie and he took care of me. Oh man, he was just so nice to me. I asked him, "When's Ted Williams coming?" and he said, "He'll be here next week." So I couldn't wait for that.

I'm in the batting cage and Williams walks out of the dugout. There's a bunch of guys standing around and I could only take about ten swings at the most. He was standing behind the batting cage and I was hitting. I took those ten swings and then I walked out and he says, "Hey, kid come over here a minute." I was shaking. He says, "Do you know who I am?" I says, "Yeah." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, you're so-and-so and he mentioned my name. He said, "I really like your swing. You've got a good swing. You've got a good bat. A live bat." Then we talked about a few other things and then he says, "You think I was a good hitter?" I says, "Oh yeah. You were a real good hitter." And he got real close to me. He took another step closer toward me and he said, "I was a real good hitter?" I said, "Yes, you were a real good hitter." He said, "Listen, kid, let me tell you something. I was the greatest goddamn hitter that ever lived and don't you ever forget it." I said, "Yes, sir!" He said, "Now get your ass out in the outfield and I'm going to hit you some fly balls" and I said OK. That was our conversation the first time I met him.

BN: He hit a few fly balls to you.

BS: Yeah, he hit them to everybody. He was in charge.

BN: There aren't that many people who caught a ball Ted Williams hit, even in practice. You had an experience that was a treat.

BS: He was hitting fly balls to the outfielders and Bobby Doerr was hitting ground balls to the infielders. Doerr was in charge of the infield and Ted Williams was in charge of the outfield. Ted wouldn't even talk to the pitchers. He didn't like the pitchers. He thought pitchers were stupid. He was there for a month.

The first say that Bobby Doerr got there, and Williams - they got there the same day - they were issued the fungo bats. What you do is you usually put white adhesive tape around those bats from the trademark up, because the ball jumps off the adhesive much better than if you don't put the tape on. So anyway, these guys get brand new fungo bats the first day with this tape on it. The tape was like a foot wide. Over the month, they would hit thousands and thousands of balls. They were hitting thousands of balls. So, three days to go before the end of spring training, Williams and Doerr were standing behind the batting cage. There was a bunch of us standing around there. We were hitting. We were just talking - when Williams was around, the conversation was about hitting, and that's all the conversation was. So Ted Williams says, "Hey,

Doerr. Let me see your bat." So Bobby Doerr's bat was all black - dark gray - from all these balls, from the trademark up to the end, which was a foot. That whole area, that foot of tape, was dark, from hitting all these balls. "Now, look at this bat," he says, holding up Doerr's bat. Everybody's looking at it. He says, "Here, this is a .220 hitter here." Then he holds up his bat and there was a black ring around that tape and that ring was about 2 inches wide at the most - and it was indented about an eighth of an inch and the rest of that tape was untouched. Untouched. And he said, "Here's the difference between a .250 hitter and a .400 hitter." All these players - even Yastrzemski - they just stared at him. They couldn't believe what they were seeing.

After practice every day, which was over around 2:30 in the afternoon, we were in the clubhouse and he would talk to the outfielders and the infielders - no pitchers. If there was any pitcher in there, he would make them go. We would sit in there until 5 or 6 o'clock, every night, and he would lecture us about hitting.

BN: Did he actually tell the pitchers to leave?

BS: Oh yeah.

BN: Because you'd think the pitchers could be helped by hearing the hitter talk.

BS: No pitchers. And no sportswriters. No sportswriters from Boston. He would just stand there and talk to us and we would sit down in front of our lockers, and he would stand up in front of all of us with a bat and he would explain the science of hitting. I'm telling you. I still remember today what he was saying.

One day four or five sportswriters came in, single file, and he stopped and looked at them and he said, "Who are you guys?" I'm a sportswriter from the Boston Globe and I'm a sportswriter from the New York Times or whatever. "Well, you guys are welcome here. You're going to have to leave. We're talking about hitting." And they just turned around and walked out. And he said, "Those goddamn sportswriters, they'll get you in trouble. Let me tell you something. Be careful what you say to these sportswriters. Some of them are poison." We said OK. We didn't know.

So anyway he would just talk about hitting. This went on almost every day after we were done. This was a big thrill. It wasn't a chore to sit there and listen to him talk about hitting.

BN: If your debut was on May 4, did you go somewhere first, or did you travel with the team right out of spring training?

BS: I broke with them. I left with the Red Sox. We played a couple of games on the way up, like in Tennessee or someplace like that. Omaha, Nebraska. I opened up with them. Fitzie told me, with two days to go, "There's only two guys left here and you're one of them. They have to make a cut here. One of you has to go." The next day Fitzie walked up to me and said, "You're staying."

BN: Who's the guy they cut? Do you remember?

BS: It might have been Jerry Moses. It's really a good thing to be sent down, if you're not ready. They want you to play. You have to play. They knew that I wasn't going to play in the major leagues. They thought more of Moses, really. They didn't want Moses sitting on the bench and not playing too much with the Red Sox in the major leagues that year. That's one of the reasons that they kept me, I think - because they wanted Moses to play.

BN: So you traveled with them about three or four weeks without getting into any games.

BS: No, I didn't play at all.

BN: Just taking batting practice and outfield.

BS: Yeah. That's it. I would take batting practice. My routine was...Fitzie. Fitzie's the guy that took care of me. I would take batting practice at 5:30 or whatever, and then I would go in and I would bring my glove and my bats out, and me and Fitzie would sit in the corner. I was paying attention to the games, even though I wasn't playing. Fitzie was explaining. Then I had a coach sitting next to me, too. We were talking about situations, whenever they came up like that. I was always sitting in the far corner down by first base. Or third base, wherever we were. And Fitzie had food there. All kinds of food, all kinds of snack. He had drinks there. Everything was set up. We had candy and crackers, and all this junk, and drinks. This was going on during the game!

I knew I wasn't going to get in, so...it was May 4th, wasn't it?

BN: The day you got in was May 4th, right.

BS: Finally, after two or three weeks, like late April, I wasn't even bringing my bats out. Or my glove. Because I knew I wasn't going to play.

Pumpsie Green, he was playing center field. At that time, he wasn't doing too well. Fitzie came up, sometime I guess in late April, and said, "You know, Green's not doing too well. The word's out that Billy might be giving you a chance to play centerfield." I thought, "Boy, that'd be wonderful." I'd never played centerfield before. It was always left field, the whole year in Wellsville. I was getting excited about that. So then on May 4, we were in Dodger Stadium. The Angels were playing in Dodger Stadium, too, when the Dodgers went on the road, 'cause the Angels didn't have a stadium yet.

So we're playing in Dodger Stadium and it's about the seventh inning and Billy Herman came up and I'm eating this candy bar and we're talking about a Ted Williams story or something, and Billy Herman walks up and he says, "I'm sorry to interrupt here, but I want you to pinch-hit." "You do?" and he said, "Yeah." And Fitzie asked, "Where's your bat?" and I said, "It's in my locker." He says, "I'll go get it for you." This is a real funny story. So Fitzie...he [Herman] was giving me some time because the inning just changed.

BN: The Angels were winning 7-0 after the seventh inning. Morehead started the game, and then Dennis Bennett - it was his first game ever, as a reliever anyway. His first appearance as a relief pitcher. He gave up a couple of runs. So maybe you were pinch-hitting for Bennett?

BS: Yeah, I was pinch-hitting for the pitcher.

BN: So they already knew he was coming out at the end of the inning.

BS: He told me as soon as the innings changed, so he was giving me some time, because I think I was the third hitter. Fitzie has about five or ten minutes to go and get my bats. "Fitzie, I'll go in...." "No, no, no. You stay right here." He goes in and he get my bat and he brings it out, and you know these rings that you put around the bat - these donuts? Well, I put that out there and then I had another bat with me because I always walked up with two bats and a donut.

The first thing I did, there's three steps going up out of the dugout. Well, I tripped there and I fall on the third step and skinned up my knee.

So now it's time for me to go up and hit because the guy just made the second out. So I'm up there in the top of the 7th or the top of the 8th, I don't remember which one.

BN: It would be the top of the eighth, if you were pinch-hitting for Bennett.

BS: Yeah, top of the eighth. Marcelino Lopez was pitching for the Angels. Now I've got this donut on my bat and I'm walking up there, and I throw the other bat away. I'm walking up to the plate with this donut and I keep pounding that bat on the ground, trying to get that donut to come off, and it wouldn't come off. I'm getting closer and closer to home plate and this umpire's looking at me and he says, "Hey, come on! Come on, come on! It's 7 to nothing here and I've got a dinner date one hour from now. We gotta make this quick. I've gotta get out of here." I said, "OK, OK, OK." He says, "Do you need help with that donut, getting it offa that bat?" I said, "Yeah, kinda...." He says, "Give me that bat." So the umpire takes the bat and gets the donut off the bat. And all these guys over on the Red Sox bench, and I guess the Angels bench, too, they were all laughing and screaming at me. So I finally get up to home plate and this catcher says, "You're a fastball hitter, aren't you?" I said, "Yeah," and he says, "Well, it's gonna be all fastballs."

So the first pitch was a curveball. And I looked at the catcher and I said, "What's going on here?" He says, "Well, so I lied. So what? I'm going to give you a lot of fastballs from now on." He started throwing me fastballs. So I grounded out to the catcher. That's what I did. What about that?

BN: How far out did it go?

BS: It just went off home plate, and it went up real high and he got me by about a half a step at first base. And then that was it.

BN: Rodgers was the catcher.

BS: Who was the catcher? What was his first name?

BN: Was it Bob Rodgers back then? [It was Buck - Robert Rodgers.]

BS: That rings a bell.

BN: We could look it up. So that's what it was. There was nobody on base at the time?

BS: Uh unh.

BN: Had somebody scored earlier in that inning? Because in the top of the 8th, the Red Sox scored a run somehow. [Pumpsie Green homered.]

BS: I can't remember that. I couldn't tell you if Pumpsie Green hit a home run because I was so nervous. So then after the game....

BN: The umpire probably made his date that night. The game was only 2 hours and 24 minutes long.

BS: He probably did. Who was coaching third base? I can't really remember who was coaching third. It was have been Popowski. Anyway, I get up there and before the first pitch I'm looking down at the coach and the umpire says, "Hey, he's not going to help you. There's no signals here. It's 7-0. You're losing. Quit looking at him. Just get in there and hit, OK? I'm in a hurry." "OK."

So, after the game, Billy Herman...now, this is in front of a lot of players, I mean this is very embarrassing. He was just getting on my case. He was having a lot of fun with me, but everybody was laughing at me when he said this. Billy Herman says, "Now listen, I couldn't pinch-hit you until we got out on the coast. In the seventh or eighth inning, it's 9 o'clock here, which means it's after midnight on the East Coast." And he says, "I really didn't want to put you in a game until it was after midnight in Boston, in case you screwed up and embarrassed the organization." [laughs]

BN: Well, you didn't embarrass the organization; you got your bat on the ball.

BS: So they started calling me the "midnight hitter!" He says you're not going to play until it's after midnight! [laughs]

BN: So you were looking forward to the next West Coast road trip, then.

BS: Yeah. But it never came. He was getting on my case about hitting after midnight in Boston. [laughs more] I guess a week later, we were back in Boston and Fitzie told me again, he says, "You know, Green's not going too well and I think Billy's going to start playing you again." I think the day after Fitzie told me that, Billy Herman calls me into his office, and I thought, "Oh God, he's going to tell me that I'm going to start playing." But he says, "You've been traded." I said, "Whaat?" He says, "Yeah, you've been traded to Kansas City" - that was before they went to Oakland. It was the Kansas City A's - Bando and Rudi and all those guys. I asked, "Am I going to Kansas City?" and he says, "No, they're sending you to the Northwest League and they want you to go to Lewiston, Idaho." I say, "Idaho?" I said, "Is that in America?" He says, "Yuh." I guess that night, like four hours later, I was on a plane going to Lewiston, Idaho. After that it goes on and on and on, and it would take me hours to tell you the rest.

[Schlesinger was apparently claimed on first-year waivers by Kansas City Athletics from Boston Red Sox on May 7, 1965.]

BN: Bob Anderson said you got traded back to Boston.

BS: What I think happened is that I got loaned out there, but he wouldn't tell me that. I think sometimes they'd do that with players - they'd loan them out to another organization and then they bring you back. That's exactly what happened to me. I was with them for the rest of that year.

BN: Did you play in Lewiston the whole time?

BS: No. I was there for two weeks and I hit .100. That team had Joe Rudi and Jackson, all those guys. Blue Moon Odom was there. Class A, but that was a better Class A than Wellsville. I couldn't hit that pitching out there. I had no idea. I thought, "Man, this is a little better than Wellsville!"

BN: You ended up back in the Boston system again.

BS: Yeah. I hit about .100 out there and the manager says, "We're gonna send you to Burlington, Iowa" which was in the Midwest League. That was the same league as Waterloo. So I went there and I finished out the rest of the '65 season. I did really well there. I hit about 25 home runs and hit about .300 again. That winter I went back with the Red Sox.

BN: And after that, you had a spell with the Cubs. And then back to Boston again?

BS: Yeah. Again! That's true. I was with the Cubs, I went to spring training with the Cubs. Leo Durocher was the manager at that time. And Ernie Banks was there - he could be the nicest human being I've ever met in my life. Ernie Banks. The nicest ever. He was just so nice to me. He was treating me like I was a veteran, and I was just a rookie. He was so nice to me. The first time I met Ernie was in spring training. The Cubs were in Arizona. It might have been Mesa. The first day, I met Ernie Banks. I was sitting in the dugout before spring training. It was drizzling, a real bad day. He walks out and it was just him and me in the dugout. He walks up and says, "So you're Bill Schlesinger?" I said, "Yeah." He says, "It's really nice to meet you. Welcome to the Chicago Cubs." And he says, "Isn't this a wonderful day to play a game? This is a good day to play two." He always said that. And it was raining. But I said, "Yeaah...it's a good day to play two." And he says, "Isn't this game of baseball wonderful?" I said, "Yeah." So he was asking me about back home in Cincinnati and asking me about my mom and dad. He was just really nice to me.

BN: You finished out '65 with the A's and did you re-sign with the Red Sox that very winter? Did you go to spring training with the Red Sox in '66?

BS: You know, I can't remember. This is really bad. I know I got traded down the road. Rick Wise was in that trade. But that was with the Phillies. The winner of '65, I guess I got a letter or a phone call saying that I was traded back to the Red Sox. Then the spring of '66, I went back to Ocala. I went to spring training with Louisville. But that was maybe later on. I was still with the Cubs in '66. [hence the Ernie Banks story] I know I went to Mobile, Alabama in the Southern League, with the Cubs, and San Antonio in the Texas League.

BN: When was it that you got hit?

BS: I didn't get hit until August of '69. In '66 I was still with the Subs. I was in Mobile, which was Double A Southern League and then they moved me to San Antonio, which was Double A Texas League. Harry Bright was my manager, and he fined me three times in a month, for not hustling. I dropped a fly ball with the bases loaded and he fined me for that. That's where I met Don Larsen. That was a big thrill. He was a nice guy, too. I was in the Texas League for about a month, and then Harry Bright calls me in and he says, "You can't play in Double A. Double A's too hard for you. We want to send you back to Lodi, California" which was in the California League. Class A. I told myself, I'm never going back to Class A. And I says, "Harry, I'm not going to Lodi, California. I'm going to quit." And he says, "You can't quit." This is the part when I think I was loaned out by the Red Sox - and I was still loaned out - even the next year. And so I says, "I'm quitting. I'm going back to Cincinnati." He says, "You can't do that." and I said, "Well, I am because I'm not going to Lodi." This is the first time I'd ever given anybody any trouble in baseball. I was going to quit, so I called my mom and dad back home and I said I'm not going back to Class A. They said, "Well, if that's what you want to do...."

About an hour later, I'm at home in my apartment and I get a phone call from John Holland, who was the general manager of the Cubs. He was calling from Chicago. He says, "Bill, what are you doing?" I said, "I'm quitting." He says, "You can't do that. You don't want to go to Lodi?" I say, "No." He says, "OK, you stay right there and I'll call you back in an hour." An hour later, he called me back and he said, "You've been traded back to the Red Sox and they want you to go to Winston-Salem." And that's what happened. That was in '66. So then I went to Winston-Salem

and I played for a guy named Bill Slack. I finished out the rest of the '66 season in Winston-Salem, which was Class A. But that was with the Red Sox, too!

BN: So you were with the Red Sox three times in about a 13-month period?

BS: Yeah. So then I finished up that year and I hit 25 more home runs, and I hit .300 again in Winston-Salem. Winston-Salem was better than Wellsville, even though it was Single A. I would play Class A again, if it was the Red Sox. I liked the Red Sox.

I stayed with the Red Sox. I went to Ocala [spring 1967] and I went to Pittsfield, Massachusetts in the Eastern League and I played there the whole year of '67. I came close to winning the Triple Crown in the Eastern League that year. At that time, that was like a pitchers' league and I only hit 21 home runs. But 21 home runs in the Eastern League was like hitting 40 somewhere else.

BN: Meanwhile the Red Sox were having a pretty good year themselves.

BS: Yeah. Heck, yeah, they were. We would watch the Red Sox any time we could. Usually on Saturday afternoons, we would watch the Red Sox.

BN: Did you go into any of those World Series games? Just as a spectator?

BS: No, I didn't.

BN: How'd you end up with the Phillies?

BS: That was '67. [meaning the year he'd just finished describing] In the spring of '68, I went to spring training with the Red Sox. I broke camp with Louisville, which was the International League Triple A. Eddie Kasko was the manager. I stayed in Louisville for a month and I hit .100 again. The first time in Triple A and that was way too hard for me then. I thought to myself, "Oh my God, this is Triple A. I have no clue what's going on here." So I hit .100 there and Eddie Kasko called me into his office and told me, "You've been traded to the Phillies and they want you to go to Eugene, Oregon." I'm missing something here, because I was out there playing with Tacoma for the Cubs. That would have been earlier. Whitey Lockman was the manager there. That was only for a month. I think that's when I got sent down to San Antonio. Yeah, that's what happened.

But anyway, I got traded to the Phillies and I went to Eugene, Oregon. Frank Lucchesi was our manager. That was in '68. No, that wasn't '68. From Louisville, I got traded to the Cubs in '68 and that's when I went to Tacoma. That was my second trip to Triple A and that was Tacoma. Then Whitey Lockman said I was traded to San Antonio. That's when I went to San Antonio with Harry Bright. That's when I quit, in '68. I went back to Pittsfield for the end of '68 and played a half a year in Pittsfield and that's when I ran into Carmen Fanzone again. The end of '68. I went back to Louisville at the beginning of '69 and then I got traded to the Phillies. I was only in Louisville for maybe two weeks, so I went out there [Eugene] for the last week of April. I played the whole year in Eugene. We opened up in Hawaii. The year before that when I was with Tacoma with Whitey Lockman. We opened up in Hawaii and we were there for seven days and I hit like six home runs and I was hitting .500. We were getting to leave Hawaii and Whitey walks up to me and says, "Well, you're doing really well." I said, "Whitey, this league is nothing. This league's easy. I belong in the major leagues." I was acting way too cocky and that'll come and get you. He said, "Hold off, hold off. This is only like a week. If you keep doing this a few moths, maybe." We left Hawaii and went to Salt Lake City and from then on I hit like .100 and that's when I think he cut me to San Antonio.

Anyway, back to Lucchesi. The next year, '69, I went out there to Louisville and I got traded to the Phillies and Lucchesi was our manager and on that team we had Bowa, Schmidt, Luzinski. We had 'em all out there. We had a great team. I played there until September. I played there the whole year. I missed the first two weeks of the season because I was with Louisville.

When I got hit - the day before I got hit - three days before I got hit - I got hit on August 20 - well, three days before I got hit, Lucchesi calls me and Schmidt and Bowa and Luzinski - he called us into this...I think Schmidt was there but I know Bowa was there, and Denny Doyle was there, too - he called all of us into his office and said, "Look, you guys are all having good years. I'm going to be the manager with the Phillies next year. When this season's going to be over in two weeks, you four guys are going to go to Philadelphia and sit on the bench for the last month of the major league season. I don't know if you're going to play too much but you're going to be in the major leagues. That night we went out and celebrated and had a party, and felt great and all that. The next day we went on the road and the next stop was Tucson. Tucson at that time was the Dodgers and Tommy Lasorda was the manager for Tucson. Our first game in Tucson, that's when I got hit. Larry Sherry was pitching. Larry Sherry's the guy who hit me. That was the night that I got hit and then I was in the hospital for about two weeks.

BN: And from that point on, losing 40% of your vision, there was just no way.

BS: No.

BN: So you never played again, really?

BS: No. I tried to play again in 1970. I went back to Tacoma, Triple A. I couldn't see the ball. I just couldn't see it. The first part of the '70 season, I tried to play and I just couldn't. The second part of the '70 season, the Phillies just had me do scouting and I would drive all over around Cincinnati watching high school games. I just hated that but that's what I did for the second half of 1970.

The doctor in Tucson said that my eyes were going to be 100% again. He was wrong. The Phillies sent me, in the winter, to a guy in Philadelphia whose name was Shea. He was supposed to be the best in the world. The guy who married Jackie Kennedy - Onassis - he would fly and see him a couple of times a year. If you remember, Onassis had terrible eyes. Dr. Shea was in charge of the Sixers and the Eagles and the Phillies. So I went up there and he checked my eyes out for five hours. After the five hours, he calls me into his office and I sat down there and he said, "You're going to have to find something else to do. Your eyes are never going to get any better for the rest of your life" - and he was right. That was like in October or November of '69.

Then in February of 1970, I called Dr. Shea and I called the Phillies and I said, "You know, I think my eyes are getting better. The Phillies said, "Well, you know...." I said, "I just want to try to play again.. I just want to know if I can play." The Phillies said, "If you want to try that again, you're going to have to sign something saying that we're not responsible." My dad said, "Now if you're going to go up there again to see Dr. Shea again and the Phillies, don't sign anything." And so that's the first thing I did. I signed something saying that the Phillies weren't responsible. My dad got really mad about that but anyway I went back to Dr. Shea and I said, "Doc, my eyes are getting better." And he said, "OK." He knew I was lying, but he said, "OK, let's do this again." I was looking in these things, looking at all these balls and numbers. I was lying to him. This guy's a genius and he knew I was lying to him and he says, "No, if you want to try to play again, I suggest you don't do this, but go ahead and do it." So that's when I went out there to Tacoma.

I went out and made sure that I couldn't play, and I couldn't. So then they released me and then they said, "Do you want to do some scouting work, because we're going to pay you for the rest of the year anyway?" I didn't want to take their money for nothing so I said OK. So then I did that.

The 1970 season's over. My dad was still alive. He passed away in March of 1972. So I came back to the hardware store. The winter of 1970 I thought my eyes were getting better again and I said, "I want to try one more time." My dad said, "I wouldn't do it." I said, "Well, I'm going to anyway." So I wrote some letters to some organizations and the only organization that would pay my way down to Florida, to spring training, was the Pirates. Now at that time Joe Brown was the owner of the Pirates. A real short guy with a big cigar. He was there. They paid my way down to spring training, the Pirates did, and so I went to spring training with the Pirates. A major league team. They didn't give me a contract but they let me train with the big club, so we go in shape for the first week and then we started playing games. The first two games I was 0-for-8 with 7 strikeouts. My third game - I think it was in Bradenton, Florida, and Joe Brown's sitting right behind the dugout in his three piece suit and his hat on, his cigar and all that but he was a wonderful guy. I met him before that day. He came up to me in the clubhouse probably the first day of spring training. He knew the whole situation, that I was hurt and all that. He said, "Just be careful" and all that. He was really nice to me.

It was like the third inning and this guy threw a pitch to me. It was up and in and I didn't see it. It just grazed the bill of my helmet. It just grazed it and I went down but I got right back up and I started going to first base because I got hit. It didn't hurt me or anything. So I got up and I started walking to first base and - this is very embarrassing - but Joe Brown jumps over that little railing there and he walks up to home plate there in his three-piece suit and he says to the umpire, "Hey" - and the manager walks out with Joe Brown and he tells the manager and the umpire, "This kid that just got hit - Bill - he's out of the game. Replace him right now. He's not going to first base. He's not going to run. He's out of the game." I was halfway to first base and I turned around, and Joe Brown yelled at me, "Bill, come back here." So I turned around and - this is embarrassing - he looks at me and says, "Go in the clubhouse. You've done for today."

BN: Didn't you have to tag first base, though?

BS: Yeah, but I didn't get there! It's spring training, though. He got a pinch-runner for me. So Joe Brown says, "Go in the clubhouse. I'll be in there in a minute." So I says OK. I'm thinking, "What's going to happen now here? I'm in trouble." So in about ten minutes Joe Brown comes walking in by himself. He sits down and says, "Now look, your dad's got a hardware store in Cincinnati?" "Yeah." "He's got a nice business. You can probably work with your dad?" I said, "Yeah." He says, "If you keep doing this, you're going to get hurt. You're really going to get hurt. This is only for your own good." He says, "You're all done playing baseball." He said, "You didn't even see that pitch, did you?" and I said, "Not really." And he says, "Well, you got lucky." And he says, "Look. Here's a plane ticket. Go back to Cincinnati and just forget about it." I said OK. That was the end of it.

BN: Let me ask you just a couple of questions. When you were with some of these other teams - in Tacoma, Winston-Salem, Louisville - did the fact that you had played in the majors - been on the team for a few weeks there - did that give you any extra kind of stature among the other players who had never even been there? Or did they even know that?

BS: No. Some of them didn't even know it. And if they did know it, no.

BN: OK. The other question was just after that time you went back to Cincinnati, have you ever had any connection with baseball? Did you ever do any bird-dogging, any kind of scouting or anything?

BS: No. No. I started playing softball. Slow pitch softball for 25 years. Until 1996. I'm in the Greater Cincinnati Softball Hall of Fame. But, see, I can see a softball if it was slow pitch. No problem. That was a lot of fun. That was for 26 years. I just quit a few years ago.

-END OF JULY INTERVIEW. ADDITIONAL MATERIAL FROM A BRIEF FOLLOW-UP ON AUGUST 12 FOLLOWS

BN: Have you kept up any relationships from your playing days? People like Bowa and Schmidt and Luzinski?

BS: No, I haven't talked to them for a while. The only person I've kept up with is Carmen Fanzone. I talk to him probably every month.

BN: Did you ever meet Tom Yawkey?

BS: Yes, I did. He gave me a present the first day I met him. In spring training, in '65. That was in Scottsdale. I just happened to have a real good game. I don't know what I did, but I had a real good game and he came up to me and introduced himself to me. He sat next to me and talked to me for about ten minutes and then he gave me this package and says, "Here. I want you to have this. You had a good game today." A gold watch. I think he had a lot of those watches. He was a really nice man.

[had not heard that Tom Yawkey often took batting practice at Fenway]

BN: You took batting practice at Fenway a few times, I guess. Did you hit some over the Wall?

BS: Yeah. That Wall's really close. That Wall takes a lot of home runs away from you. If you hit line drives that are home runs in other parks, they're just singles [at Fenway.]

[BN: I'm told that Larry Sherry only ever hit one batter in 11 years in the majors.] You didn't think he was head-hunting or anything, did you?

BS: Yeah, he could have been. I hit a home run off him the time before. He wasn't throwing hard. That was in his last year. He was in the minor leagues [on his way out of baseball.] He wasn't throwing hard then. That's why...I just figured that he couldn't hurt me even if he did hit me, but he hit me in a real bad place. I couldn't get out of the way.

BN: When you see a player get hit today, do you have any reactions?

BS: Oh yeah. Sure. I think about it all the time. I think about it almost every day.

There's one thing I wanted to tell you. Did you get Dolson's book? In the beginning of that book, there was a story about Pat Bayless. He didn't look too good, did he? [in the photos in Frank Dolson's book *Beating the Bushes*.] Well, that's the way he looks today. He tried to kill himself three or four times. We were roomies for a while. I can understand what happened to that kid. He got hurt, too.

I'm trying to think of a way to tell you this. I don't want you to think I'm cocky or conceited or anything like that. I'm way far from that. But the bad thing about my injury was...in the beginning, when I played with Boston, there's no way I should have been there, because I wasn't good enough. I just got there too early.

Baseball was the only thing I could do. I couldn't play football. I couldn't play basketball. I just wasn't good enough. But baseball, I played my whole life. If I wasn't good enough to play in the major leagues, that would have been one thing. Then if I would have gotten hurt, I would have told myself, "Well, you know, I wasn't really that good anyway so the injury doesn't bother me." But I was good enough. It took me five years to learn how to hit. I could hit fastballs right away but it took me a couple years at least to learn how to hit breaking stuff.

My career was going up and down, up and down. That was about my third trip to Triple A. My first two trips to Triple A, I couldn't handle it. I wasn't good enough. I just kept going. Those teams - the Phillies and the Cubs and the Red Sox - they didn't give up on me. No matter where I went, I played. I never sat on the bench, and that was the most important thing. I could do a lot of things in baseball. I was pretty close to doing all five things. But in the beginning, I wasn't even close. All I had was power and speed. Then I learned how to catch the ball, throw the ball, and hit. It just took me four or five years to learn. I thought I was ready.

BN: It sounded like they thought you were ready, too. They told you they were bringing you up in September.

BS: Yeah. Just to sit on the bench, though. Still, you're in the major leagues. That's the part that really hurts me. I really thought that I was ready to play in the major leagues.

BN: They wouldn't have brought you up, even to sit on the bench, if they didn't think you had a chance of being there the next year.

BS: Right. I think I really had a real good chance the next spring, 'cause Lucchesi was going to be the manager of the Phillies. The next year, I did go to spring training with the Phillies, but I couldn't see. That's the part that really bothers me, because I felt I was good enough to play in the major leagues for a while.

[I asked if he had ever talked with fellow Cincinnati Don Zimmer, who had also been hit in the head with a baseball and seriously injured. He had - as he had with Tony Conigliaro, but in both cases it was before his own injury. Tony C was a teammate. Of him, Bill said, "He would have been a Hall of Famer. I still think he has the record for the most homers as a rookie. And that ballpark was made for him,"]

BN: When pitchers get charged with being headhunters, they always talk about how they have to establish the right to throw inside.

BS: I've always felt that the real good pitchers don't have to do that. Koufax never did that.

BN: Pedro Martinez has been accused of doing that, moving people back off the plate.

BS: Mm hmm. And Clemens. I know a lot of pitchers who don't believe in that. Good pitchers. I never saw Koufax do that. In my opinion, he's one of the best. You know, those guys are messing around with your career, when they try to come up - from the waist up. If they want to throw at your legs or something, that's one thing, but the other's another [matter.] I've seen a lot of guys this year get hit in the head. You just can't get out of the way of it.

BN: It sounded from talking to you that you kind of have a special thing for the Red Sox. You're kind of a fan of the team these days?

BS: Oh yeah. Well, they're the ones that gave me a chance. I follow them pretty close. They treated me really well. I don't know how their organization is now, because Yawkey's gone. But when I was there - and Pat Patterson told me this from Day One when I signed with the Red Sox - the day I signed with the Red Sox, when that guy [Denny Galehouse] was in the office here. Pat was here the next day, and he said, "Well, you don't know it now but you've signed with one of the best organizations in baseball." And he was right.

I'll tell you a few reasons why. When we would go on the road, there's different kinds of motels and hotels. Moneywise. We always stayed at the best. Always. You could tell. You just knew. Plus we were expected to wear a sport coat of a suit on the road, all the time. You're representing the Boston Red Sox. You're supposed to do that. You don't want the Red Sox to look bad.

When we would get off the plane, we would never go in the terminal. We would never touch our bags. It's just little things that let me see that the Red Sox were really a good organization. That call came from Tom Yawkey. He was a special guy.

BN: Some of us here live and die for the Red Sox. I don't know if you qualify that way.

BS: Well, I want to see them win the World Series. Not just get in the World Series, I want to see them win it before I die. They haven't won it since, what, 1918? The ultimate would be the Cubs and the Red Sox in the World Series.

BN: Do you get people who just sort of randomly mail you requests for autographs?

BS: I get baseball cards. Especially during the summer, I get at least a dozen of my baseball cards mailed to me every month. I was on Topps. There's a baseball card with four of us on the card - Red Sox. That was in '65, and then in '68, there's a baseball card with the Cubs, with me and Jose Arcia. So I've got two cards out. You want the numbers on them? Sometimes I sign them. Well, I should sign all of them, but I don't.

BN: Do most of them toss in a dollar or two, anyway?

BS: They don't send any money. I think most of them sell them. They send a return envelope. I've been told that most of them sell 'em. Many some other ones are legitimate. Most of them are the Cubs cards. The Red Sox card is worth more. The Cubs card, I think, is worth about \$5.00 and the Red Sox card is worth maybe \$10 or \$12. They say if I sign it, it's worth a little bit more. If I die, it's worth even more.

END