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What the Worst Team in Baseball Taught Me About My Mom's Family

By **Mary Jane Weedman**



Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles. Photo: Courtesy Dodger Stadium

When I was growing up, my mother, Julie, was a diehard fan of the Kansas CityRoyals — then among the **worst** teams in baseball, with the **longest** playoff drought in professional sports.

Still, she loved them. It slightly baffled me. We frequently drove up to Kauffman Stadium, Kauffman Stadium, heading to stands that were typically empty, to watch the team lose. When we didn't go to the games, I would watch her holler at the television about the strike zone. I liked the Royals, sure. But never did I quite understand how she could love them so much when they caused her so much sorrow.

She tried to make me see why, even as, in the mid-2000s, they lost 100 games or more in a season three years in a row. My grandfather had moved his family³ to Kansas City the year the Royals were established, 1969. Mom would try to tell me about the glory days that followed, in the '70s and '80s, when her family and the rest of KC had cheered the Frank White–and–George Brett–led team to victory after victory; she knew what players like those guys could mean to a city.⁴

After I moved to New York in 2007, my mom became fixated on one name: Zack Greinke.⁵ The Royals were still “rebuilding,” but watching him, I began to understand what Mom had seen in the team all along — and how immensely satisfying it was to watch players *win* and energize a city. They still failed to make the playoffs, but I began to follow the Royals once more, to understand as my mom made mental calculations under the dinner table, checking scores⁶ on her phone (“*If the Rangers lose their next three, and the Rays drop the series this weekend, we’ll be in the Wild Card slot!*,” etc.).

In 2015, the team won the World Series, after narrowly missing the title the previous year. I was really glad then that my mom had taught me how to love the Royals; I called her that night in hysterics. I finally truly understood. I cry now when I rewatch games from the 2014 and 2015 playoffs (which I do often) And I cry, of course, when I watch the 2014 Wild Card game. The Royals came from four runs behind to beat the Athletics (a team that once called KC home), earning their first playoff berth since 1985.). It took a while, but my mom had finally gotten me hooked on baseball.

As soon as the baseball season ended in 2016, we sat down and started planning⁸ a big trip for the next summer: The Royals would be taking a long California trip, which seemed like the perfect time to catch a few of their games and see five ballparks that were new to us. So we met at LAX⁹ in June and picked up, nostalgia on full blast, a shiny blue Ford Mustang convertible. It felt perfect for the trip — is any car in history more recognizable, more of an American icon? We put the top down (I will have the sunburn to prove it for a week), and then we made our way to San Diego for our first game.

San Diego



The Hotel Z is situated just a five-minute walk from Petco Park. Photo: Courtesy Hotel Z

We check in to our hotel, the **Hotel Z**, a fun boutique StayPineapple property in the Gaslamp Quarter. (Nightly rates can be as low as \$99 but vary greatly — San Diego hosts many conferences, and rates will rise across the board during those

times.) There's plenty of nice touches here: free bike rentals; absurdly comfortable Scandinavian-style double duvet covers on the beds; complimentary pineapple cupcakes on arrival. Visiting baseball teams often book their rooms at the Omni, which has more than 500 rooms and is connected to the park via [skywalk](#), but we loved the small-hotel feel.

Then we walk the five minutes to [Petco Park](#), stopping for a beer flight at the [Stone Brewing Tap Room](#) before lining up for the excellent stadium [tour](#).¹⁰ The park surprised us more than any other in California. It's relatively new, having opened in 2004 after being designed by the architecture firm [Populous](#).¹¹ It's a blast in the ways we've come to expect from stadiums: There's a great bar area with pool tables, big TVs, and Instagram-ready backdrops; the bar and a mini-museum and [hall of fame](#) are built around the structure of what was here before, the 1909-constructed, landmarked [Western Metal Supply Co. building](#). Suites are fun and fancy; sight lines are terrific from virtually every seat. There's even a several-acre park with views of the stadium.



Park at the Park at Petco. Photo: Courtesy San Diego Padres

But it outranks so many other parks for us — we liked it even better than the incredible AT&T Park, where the Giants play — because it's so visually stunning.

Head to the upper deck and turn around to see a small hilly range and islands: That's Mexico. It's a perfect place for the first [game](#) on our tour, even if the Royals do fall to the Padres. At least we get to see [Wil Myers](#).¹²

The next morning, Saturday, we wake up and borrow Hotel Z's bikes for a ride along the water and then to Little Italy, stopping at the trendy-hip, indoor-outdoor [Lofty Coffee](#) for a latte before heading to the [farmers' market](#) for fresh [uni](#)¹³ and poke from [Island Life Foods](#); we eat it in nearby Amici Park while watching the local [bocce league](#).

After, we make a quick detour to Coronado and have an absurdly priced but prettily backdropped lunch at the [Hotel Del](#). Shortly after my mother's parents were married in 1953, they'd lived here; Pa, my name for my grandfather, had been stationed at the Coronado Naval Base. We pause for a bit, sitting on the beach and reflecting, then get back in the car and head to Los Angeles.

The coast and towns like Solana Beach are beautiful, but the car is a big part of what makes the drive to L.A. so pleasant and sentimental. There is something about the safety and seclusion of being in a car — and knowing you'll be in it a while — that inspires heartfelt conversation. And we had a familial history there too: My grandfather had had an impossibly cool [first-generation](#) Mustang convertible when my mom was in high school. I'd grown up always wanting to drive a **Mustang** myself — though I never did¹⁴ until this vacation. We had a gorgeous modern [version](#) that could read our text messages aloud to us via Bluetooth as we drove, something we marveled at, trying to picture what we would have thought in 1967.

Lodging: [Hotel Z](#). **Bars and restaurants:** [Stone Brewing Tap Room](#), [the Little Italy Mercato Farmers Market](#), [the Hotel Del Coronado](#). **Game:** Padres 6, Royals