



## The View From Right Field

by Rick Ohler

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“Safe at Home”

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**W**e've been watching a compelling thriller called *Stranger Things* lately. I'm not sure if it's on Hulu, HBO Max, Fire TV, Netflix, YouTube, Roku, Apple TV, Amazon Prime, Disney, Starz, tvOS, TNT, MTV, VH1, Sling, Pandora TV, Yahoo, LiveStream, SpamStream, TanneryBrookStream—okay, I made that one up—or something prehistoric like NBC. I'm from the generation that was absolutely amazed and thrilled when Channel 7 joined Channels 2 and 4 on our black and white TV menu in 1957, giving us a dizzying third option for programming. So you'll pardon me if I am as lost trying to decipher our Smart TV as I would be trying to locate the exit in an autumn corn maze. I get so aggravated that I have been instructed to surcease (RIP Snake) from using the remote and let the more capable of the two of us handle the clicker and conversations with Alexa.

Anyway, we have been watching *Stranger Things*, a sci-fi, fantasy, horror series with some excellent characters, even if the show's premise asks us to let the laws of physics and chemistry

we learned in school take the day off. The most intriguing character, the one we are rooting for, finds herself in a seasons' long search for among other things, home, or as she asks, "home?"

Which brings me, in a roundabout way, to the idea behind this week's message from Right Field. Home.

A few weeks ago, we—those of us who have stuck around after high school and beyond—hosted another in what has been 30-plus years of Reunion Weekends. I capitalize Reunion Weekend even though it may not deserve it; it's a tradition now, not an official occasion. It doesn't even have a legitimizing Reunion Weekend Committee overseeing everything. The Rotary Club has its party at the rink, the Backyard Bash features Never Ben (for 13 of the past 15 years, anyway), classes hold get togethers, and Main Street shuts down for the Saturday Sidewalk Sale, each item independent of the others but still working toward an unspoken but common end, the celebration of home.

One of the best parts of Reunion Weekend is running into long-lost classmates and friends and hearing them say that word. Home.

"Gotta get home, every July if I can," or, "It's great to be back home," or, "Home looks just like it did in high school." Those more recently arrived to the area can often be heard to utter words the effect of, "They don't do this where I come from," and then they jump into the fray, approaching as nearly as one from away can, the status of townie.

The Thursday of Reunion Weekend past, July 28, a memorial for my brother, Jason, took place at the lower grove of the East

Aurora Fish and Game Club, a near-perfect venue for a gathering. My brother, mind you, had not lived in East Aurora since the late 1970s; he spent four and a half decades in Alaska and Arizona. Yet eight of his EAHS '71 classmates—Kent Diebolt, Jamie Gregory, Donna Reynolds Huprich, Sarah Pitkin, Karen Seebohm, Rennie Selkirk, Eric Severance, Elise Taylor Rogers and Laurie Herrmann from 1972—as well as some of our family and EA friends, conceived, planned and presented an affirming celebration of life that won't soon leave any attendee's memory. Other memorials, I fear, will pale in comparison. In itself, it stands as a momentous occasion. But then realize that of the nine who carried out this expression of love, not one lives in East Aurora. They now live in Florida, Maryland, New Mexico, Utah and Vermont. Yet when they say home, they mean the 14052. The strength of that bond has only strengthened, 51 years removed.

Of all the many touching moments during the celebration, one of the most enduring will remain the arrival of Jason's classmate, Lenny "The Great Mazu" Mazurkiewicz. Wheeled by his dedicated pal and classmate Slim Trendell and accompanied by his indefatigable wife, Jenny, Lenny held court from his wheelchair, greeting one and all, grasping an offered hand and acknowledging each of the '71 faithful by sporting what has become his trademark, the continuous grin, a workable substitute for his once welcoming voice and adorable stutter.

Many were surprised to see The Great Mazu, assuming that the effort and logistics of transportation to an outdoor venue might prove hardly worth it. They'd have that wrong, though. Lenny, I choose to believe, understands his altered but crucial role in the place he, and so many others, call home.

Ten days ago, American Legion Post 362 held its major fundraiser—the Bills Tailgate Party. Of course, Lenny was there, receiving admirers like royalty. At our inaugural Old Timers Legends of Baseball Game, Lenny threw out the first pitch. The fundraiser for Lenny in the fall of 2019 raised more money by far than any single-day event in town history. He may no longer be the master of ceremonies or official toastmaster, but he is there. At event after event, when you least expect it, here comes Lenny, his presence lending a depth, dimension and perspective to all he touches, whatever the occasion.

Last Thursday, Lenny's former Glory Days 50 & Over League softball team, Wally's Dudas, were locked in a championship game against Alp Steel. In terrain ill-suited to wheelchair travel, Lenny and Jenny arrived to cheer his boys on to victory.

It was only fitting since eight years earlier, it was Lenny who had led the Dudas to their first championship in 45 years. I was manager that year, saddled with the responsibility of making game-day lineups. But in the championship game, Lenny, our first baseman, came to me a few minutes before the first inning. "I'm pitching," he said. What was I supposed to say—no? He has plaques in three halls of fame, Aurora Baseball & Softball, East Aurora High School Athletics and Buffalo & WNY Baseball & Softball, and I was the guy whose brightest softball moment came when an opposing team mistook me for Lenny and walked me intentionally ([www.rickohler.com/columns](http://www.rickohler.com/columns) "The Great Mazu"), fearing one of Mazu's Ruthian, tape-measure blasts. Lenny proceeded to pitch the whole game, urging his football lineman-sized body into balletic baseball moves to field hot grounders and throw runners out at first. He also singled twice and shut down the opponents in the bottom of the seventh, assuring the trophy-clinching victory.

Before the Dudas took the field last Thursday, they gathered by his wheelchair for a pregame chant, “One-two-three, Lenny!” And when they had recorded the final out to secure the championship, they wheeled Lenny to—where else?—home plate where he held the trophy for the team photo.