Mickey Mantle
Is Going to Heaven

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Foreword

Mel Stottlemyre says, "Because of the events of his trading families, Fritz has never been given the credit for being the great Yankee pitcher that he was. The book tells you of the great imagination Fritz had for pulling pranks and keeping us loose in the clubhouse." Mel's wife Jean said, "Great reading. Funny, sad, and very informative."

Bobby Murcer's wife Kay said in an email to Fritz in January, 2010, "Congratulations on putting together some sweet thoughts of those times we all shared…we each have different memories and it's good to see how others remember them. Of course, many were new to me and your humor plays out as I always heard Bobby tell it. He would have enjoyed critiquing the book then bantering with you on it…I plan to share it with Todd and Tori when I go to Dallas next month."

Author of the bestselling book, "Munson: The Life and Death of a Yankee Captain", Marty Appel says, "in addition to revealing practical jokes that read funny, the book touches on the controversial subjects of which Yankees are going to Heaven (aside from Mantle), which aren't, and where Fritz's own notoriety from the famous "domestic trade" of the 70's puts him as he faces his own mortality.

It's much better than reading a ghost written autobiography (& I've done them!) where you say, 'no way does the guy talk like this'. This IS Fritz, the real deal, and if his memory isn't as good as an avid fans, or if he screws up a few facts, that's fine—it's the way a baseball player remembers this, not a ghostwriter combing through archives."

While some writing critics have said the book has some "sloppy editing", Senior AOL Correspondent writer, Buck Wolf agrees but says it is also what makes the book such a good read. Mr. Wolf says, "It was like reading a stream-of-conscious journal of a guy who has lived a very rich life, who doesn't mind laughing at himself and the world."

One of the most famous sports writers alive today; author of over 40 books himself, Maury Allen said, "I thought the book was terrific, better than Bouton's ("Ball Four") with so much Fritz humor and brutal honesty coming through. The insight on Bobby (Murcer) & Thurman (Munson) and Mickey (Mantle) and Whitey (Ford) and the rest was wonderful. Amazing how players can learn how to write but writers can never learn to play."

To reach Fritz, visit:
http://www.mickeymantleisgoingtoheaven.com

Acknowledgements

I appreciate my wife of over 35 years for letting me have time to write this book expressing my thoughts concerning my feelings toward my living and deceased teammates, fellow athletes, and writers, wherever they may be.

Thank you Bob Evely, a minister of a Church in Wilmore, Kentucky, for the constant help in keeping the spiritual part of this book in line with what the Bible teaches and for helping me with the unusual, one of a kind, glossary. Although some of my comments concerning the 1,000 year millennial baseball game between the Yankees and the Mets are, or course, imagined, the rest of the book is quite serious. Mr. Evely has a M. Divinity Degree from Asbury Theological Seminary and was ordained in the United Methodist and the Free Methodist denominations. Thanks for keeping me on track where it counted.

Talking about "on track", thank you Jim Roth, our faithful attorney for going through all my statements in an attempt to keep me a free man in this litigious society. Glad you're a Yankee fan!

Thanks to Dr. Richard Williams, University of Iowa Clinic, for keeping me alive long enough to finish this project. I appreciate

the research project you helped me get into in an effort to slow the progress of my recurring prostate cancer.

Thanks to you too, Byron (and Anita) Tobias for your editing. I'm sure you had to look twice several times at the content in a few of the chapters concerning what really went on inside the clubhouses I inhabited over the years. What I wrote did happen. Good luck in your writing career!

Also, a thank you to Brian Loveman, an executive at Morgan Stanley in New York and Dr. Bruce Alpert, a Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Tennessee in Memphis, TN for your help with some touch up work.

Thanks to some of the greatest Yankee fans of all times for reviewing these chapters and adding their thoughts. Dick McCauley, former ABC Radio Vice President, Danny Austin, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, Nova Southeastern University in Ft. Lauderdale, FL, and Susan J. Fescharek, a lifelong Yankee fan and personal friend, for a woman's perspective.

Thank you Mrs. Thelma Smith (wonderful mother and wife of 3 of my "Yankee Fantasy Campers") for her insistence on me doing this book "my way", as different as that might be.

Also, thanks to Marty Appel, ex-Public Relations man for the New York Yankees and ongoing, successful author of many sports books for straightening out some of my forgotten baseball facts. Good luck on your book, "Munson—The Life & Death of a Yankee Captain"!

For the families of the deceased players I wrote about, and the ones who are still on this earth. Remember: the thoughts I presented in this book are only my opinion. God is the final judge and He never gives up. There's still time to be added to the "active roster" if you're not on it yet. Anyway, after the last out is made, everything's going to be OK!

CHAPTER 1

I Miss Mickey!

(When asked if he thought Mickey Mantle was going to Heaven, former teammate and a pallbearer at Mickey's funeral, Johnny Blanchard said, "Where Mickey's going, it's HOT, I can guarantee you that!" 11/22/06)

Bobby Richardson came to the mound in my very first inning pitching for the New York Yankees during our first road series of the 1966 season and said, "Do you hear what Mickey is yelling"? I said "no" (I was concentrating on the hitter, Frank Robinson, the number 3 hitter for the Baltimore Orioles and didn't hear "anything"). Bobby told me Mickey was saying "hurry up"! The reason Bobby came in to tell me this is that he didn't want me to take it personally, especially in my first game in the big leagues. What Mickey was trying to tell me, in essence, was that it wasn't necessary for me to take my time between every pitch just because I was in the big leagues now. I now know that players, especially outfielders, like to keep a game going at a faster pace since the time goes by slower for them because they aren't involved in every play like the infielders are, especially with sinkerball pitchers like me or Mel Stottlemyre on the mound.

Ever since that time, I became one of the "quickest" pitchers in the league, once completing a game in an hour and 18 minutes in a nine inning match against Ferguson Jenkins later on in my career. The media loved it too since they could get their stories in to their papers sooner so they could get out to the bars and restaurants quicker after

games, especially on road trips. The writers and I thank Mickey for that! One time a writer even asked me why I worked so quickly out on the mound. I answered (honestly), "So I can hurry up and see who wins". They loved it and I really did too! Thanks Mickey!

The first time I personally saw Mickey was in 1963. I had been invited to work out for the Yankee "brass" while the Yankees were in Chicago for a road trip in June of that year. I had just come off of a career making season at the college I ended up graduating from, Northern Illinois University, earning all kinds of honors in Division One College baseball in the season that just ended.

After eating breakfast with my dad and 2 of the Yankee scouts, I got to ride on the team bus from the hotel in Chicago to the ballpark for my tryout in front of the Yankee "brass". It was a thrill to be on the same bus and hear the Yankees chatting and joking on the 15 minute trip to Comiskey Park. I was amazed to see that I was taller than Mickey Mantle, Roger Maris, and especially Whitey Ford. I was only 6 feet tall. But I noted Mickey's forearms. As big as Popeye's! Guys look so much bigger on TV!

The next time I would see, and actually meet Mickey, was 2 ½ years later in spring training of 1966. I had been placed on the 40 man roster and was invited to spring training with the big club after a really great season the year before, splitting the season between Greensboro, NC (A ball) and Columbus, GA. (AA ball).

Mickey was awesome! He knew rookies were reluctant to come up to him and say hello because he was so incredibly famous. So he would actually come over to us when the occasion presented itself and say, "Hi, I'm Mickey Mantle". As if we didn't know! That's how he was in the clubhouse.

Mickey liked me even though I wasn't in his "group" per se. He was at the twilight of his career (in pain) and I was just starting mine.

His buddies were mostly gone by that time, Billy Martin, Yogi Berra, John Blanchard, etc., but Whitey Ford was still there even

though Whitey was almost beneath his twilight with severe circulation problems in his pitching arm. All in all, Mickey wasn't having much fun by the time I got to the Yankees.

I nicknamed Mickey "Thumper", which he liked. It came from a game in spring training in which he hit a monster homer (right-handed) off of a hard throwing left-handed pitcher for the White Sox by the name of Juan Pizzaro. Other than a homer that Boog Powell hit off of me in 1970, the one Mantle hit off Pizzaro was the hardest shot I ever saw. Because of that, I nicknamed him "Thumper". I wish I could have been there to see some of the tape measure shots he hit in his prime!

One night, on a road trip to Baltimore in 1967, Mickey and I ended up in the same restaurant after a game. Whitey was a coach at the time and didn't stay out as long as Mickey that night so Mickey ended up by himself at the bar. When it came time for the restaurant to close I saw Mickey leaving by himself and looking a little tipsy. I decided to walk him back to the hotel because it wasn't a real good part of town and I didn't want to see him get hit by a car, or maybe mugged.

On the walk to the hotel Mickey gave me some good advice. He said, "Hey Fritz, if you ever see someone driving toward you with a hand over one of his eyes, get off the road, it's me, and I'm drunk! I do it so I don't see double!" I thanked him for the advice as we laughed and went to our rooms in the hotel.

By 1968, Mickey was the only one left from the most recent Yankee "dynasty" days. Stottlemyre, Pepitone and Tresh were still there but they had come in after the real core of the Yankee team that had been in place before their arrival. Really, Mickey was the only one that virtually everyone wanted to see. I remember thinking, how can anyone go watch the Mets across town, a "no name" team when they could still come to Yankee Stadium and see a living legend, Mickey Mantle, play. They did, however as Yankee attendance was down to an all time low from the last 20 years while

at the same time the Mets continued to draw fans from a city that had been abandoned by the Dodgers and the Giants less than a decade before.

As much as I couldn't stand the Mets or their fans, their team was really beginning to put something together. They did it mainly with pitching. They had Seaver and Koosman and a few other excellent pitchers but they were still only the Mets, a no name team from nowhere! The Yankees were (and are and always will be), the Yankees and still had #7, Mickey Mantle on their active roster!

Many times I saw Mickey hounded by autograph seekers, especially after the last game of a home stand when we would take a bus from Yankee Stadium to LaGuardia Field in the Queens for a road series. Fans would swarm the players for autographs when they came from the clubhouse to the bus, especially Mickey. Most of the time Mickey would sign 40 or 50 autographs until the bus driver had to close the doors to pull away from the curb. Some of the remaining fans would yell obscenities at Mickey for not signing their items. I still haven't figured out what "Schultz'" means but many times he would get "You Schultz"! Mickey was a nice guy but I could tell things in the "big apple" were getting to him. Along with the pain in his legs and the Yankees not winning anymore year after year and with little hope of improvement in the near future, the party was coming to an end for Mickey.

Fans would still try anything to get Mickey's autograph. When I first came up, the other rookies and I would be targeted by seasoned fans trying to get to Mickey. Very often they would say to us, hey, tell Mickey his high school coach was up here (in the stands) and would like to say hi to him. I, like the others, would fall for it a few times but Mickey would never embarrass us but instead would let us figure it out for ourselves. Once in a while, just to pimp an untruthful fan, Mickey would actually come over and sign his ball or whatever with "Best f---ing wishes, Mickey Mantle". I hope those people kept those autographs since those were real, most others weren't!

Each day of a home stand the first thing most of us would do was head to the table in the middle of the clubhouse to sign baseballs. Usually there were about 4 dozen baseballs sitting on the table to be autographed. When we were through we would get our uniforms on and head out to the field to take batting practice and get loose for the game. Mickey would come in a little later than the rest of us but his name was already signed on the baseballs, on the sweet spot, an isolated place on the baseball where there was only room for one autograph, a spot quietly reserved for the "star" of the team who, of course, was Mickey.

A few times after games Mickey would leave before me and the next day I would beat him to the park. After a while I realized that Mickey didn't sign those balls on the table at all—our clubhouse man, Pete Sheehy had done the "honors" for Mickey. Needless to say, thousands of people have gotten signed Yankee baseballs with 24 authentic signatures on them and one fake one, the fake being the only one that really counted. Mickey's!

Big Pete was very secretive. He had been there since Babe Ruth and knew things about all of us that he would never ever tell anyone, thank goodness. He could have written dozens of books about what he knew and learned in the clubhouse over the years but it was a known fact, you could trust Big Pete. Just think of how we might feel if Big Pete had told what he knew about Lou Gehrig? The name of the movie, "The Pride of the Yankees" might have to be changed!

I was there when Mickey hit the homerun off of Denny McLain on September 19, 1968 in Detroit. I also pitched a game that year against McLain in Detroit, though not the one Mantle hit his 535th in. Denny was unbeatable that year!

I overheard Mickey say in our clubhouse the night I faced McLain, "Who's the lamb tonight for us", meaning; who would be getting tonight's loss for our team because we were facing McLain. Mickey didn't know I was in the clubhouse getting my pregame stretch, but I was to be the "lamb". I never told him I heard it because he would

have felt terrible.

McLain, who should have been left-handed the way he behaved, was somewhat crazy. Fun-crazy in a way. He had done some dumb stuff like pouring a bucket of ice water on the head of a wonderful older Detroit newspaperman, Waddy Spoelostra, but on September 19, 1968 he did something really nice for Mickey.

Denny sensed that Mantle would not be back to Tiger Stadium again because of his age and physical problems (knees mainly) so when Mickey came up to bat later in the game with Detroit leading by 3 or 4 runs he called his catcher, Bill Freehan out to the mound and told him that he was going to "groove one" for Mick. McLain told Freehan to ask Mickey where he wanted the pitch to be. Freehan did it and I remember seeing Mickey put his hand out about waist high and over the middle of the plate to show McLain where to throw it. McLain did it but Mickey just took the pitch for a strike! Mickey didn't believe he'd do it! McLain did it again and Mickey fouled it back. But the third time he connected for #535. Mickey would only hit one more home run, the next day in New York, but unless I had seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed what had just happened with that pitch to Mantle in Detroit that night!

The homer was both a very happy occasion and a sad one at the same time. Happy, of course, because Mickey hit another home run but sad because he "almost" needed help to hit a home run at the end of his fantastic career. I'm glad that he didn't need any help the next day against Jim Lonborg at Yankee Stadium where he had hit so many before, especially when they counted. It was truly an honor to have played with him as my teammate for 3 years and to have been the starting pitcher for the Yankees on the day that he hit his last major league homerun. I wish our time together as Yankees could have been longer but he was in so much pain at the end that I was actually relieved for him when he decided to retire! If he had known how hard it would be to earn money right after that, he might have decided to play longer despite the pain. Babe Ruth found out the same thing.

While Mickey was angry that he didn't end up a career .300 hitter (.298), another great player who flirted with a career .300 mark was Al Kaline, the toughest hitter I had to face over my entire career in the big leagues. Kaline was having a horrible year (for him) in 1973. It was actually sad to see Al struggle even though he had given me a lot of trouble during Yankee/Tiger games for years. He was a real thinker at the plate and a real competitor. He was still trying to find a way to beat you if it were the 8th inning and his team was trailing by 8 runs.

The Tigers were in New York for a series in 1973 and Kaline was at the point, in the game that I was pitching, that he needed one base hit to bring his career average up to .300. Having seen what Denny McLain did for Mantle in 1968, I had our catcher, for that game, Duke Sims, a former teammate of Kaline's the year before, come out to the mound to talk over the situation concerning Al's batting average. Duke told me earlier that day that if Kaline got a hit the Tigers were going to take him out of the game immediately and Kaline would retire as a lifetime .300 hitter.

Kaline was good at everything so Duke suggested that he would tell Al to lay a bunt down along the third base line if I would agree to throw him a fastball "down the pipe". It was like what McLain did for Mantle five years before. I did my part and Kaline laid down a beauty toward third which he beat out for a hit. The problem was, not only did the Tigers NOT take him out of the game, he went on another entire year as a designated hitter, giving me the same hard time at the plate that he had the entire 8 years I had to face him! Thanks Duke! Kaline ended up a lifetime .297 hitter. Should have come out of the game after the bunt Al!

Kaline was a real fan of Mickey's throughout their careers. One time a fan told Kaline that he wasn't half the player Mickey Mantle was. Al's answer to the fan was, "Son, nobody's half as good as Mickey Mantle"!

Sadly enough, but not surprising in lieu of what I've discovered in life, at Kaline's induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1980, in

his speech he said, "There's got to be more to life than this". I used to feel that way too and even though I never made the Baseball Hall of Fame, I have good news; there is more to life than the Baseball Hall of Fame! In fact, some of the most miserable people around are members of the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Realizing what Mickey Mantle meant to the Yankees, to baseball, and to all his teammates and friends, I did something that I hated to do, I asked Mickey if I could have something of his to keep as a memento after his last game at Yankee Stadium. He looked around his locker and gave me his last elastic knee wrap. It had "Mick" written on it. It represented to me not only Mickey as a teammate but Mickey the man who endured pain but didn't complain once about it. However, I did ask him one time what his knees felt like. He said, "Like 2 toothaches that never go away".

I had seen Mickey many times since 1968, mostly at Yankee Old Timer games, but I never bothered him for anything. He and Whitey would always have a place to hide after the Old Timers Game, just past the trainer's room to just hang out and catch up on things and not be bothered by current players or their kids. Joe DiMaggio had his own "hiding room" since he and Mickey didn't really get along. Mickey didn't appreciate the fact that Joe made the stadium announcer, Bob Shepherd, introduce him last as the "Yankees greatest living player" or he wouldn't attend Old Times Day. Mickey didn't need that stuff. Now days, the old timers get their own clubhouse and don't mix with the current players in the regular Yankee clubhouse.

Mickey never liked "Mr. October" either. Reggie Jackson liked to try to tie into Mickey's fame as much as he could but Mickey didn't let it happen. Reggie always asked Mickey when he was going to invite him to his golf course in Texas but Mickey never would. Reggie was what Bill Veeck called a "rent a player". Mickey was a lifetime Yankee. Reggie was a "rental".

When I heard that Mickey had died, it didn't surprise me. His

illness was highly publicized and some of my Yankee friends who were close to the family had alerted me that Mickey was not well and wouldn't last much longer. What I was concerned about most was about where Mickey would spend eternity.

Having been with Baseball Chapel for 3 years in the early 1980's I had been taught that if a person "accepted Jesus as his (her) personal Lord and Saviour", before he or she dies that they go to Heaven immediately to be with the Lord when they die. Forever! Conversely, if they didn't, they would go to hell; no if, ands, or buts about it. Forever! I didn't know where Mickey stood with the Lord and it bothered me greatly. I knew Mickey wasn't an "angel" on earth (none of us are) and I really was concerned whether or not he had made the right decision, or not.

Mickey had told me at the last Old Timers game I was at with him in New York that if he had known he'd have lived that long that he would have taken better care of himself while he was still playing. No male in the Mantle family had lived beyond 40 years of age prior to Mickey. Mickey said he tried to pack as much into his 40 years as possible! Babe Ruth was said to have squeezed about 150 years into his 50+ years on earth and Mickey wanted to do the same with whatever time he had left.

Mickey, knowing that I had been with the Baseball Chapel ministry joked about being turned down at the gates of Heaven by St. Peter and then being asked whether he would mind autographing a dozen balls for God before he left! It wasn't funny anymore, now it was all real!

On August 13, 1995 I found out from an ex-teammate and friend that Mickey had indeed "accepted Jesus as his Lord and Saviour"! Bobby Richardson let me, and the rest of the world know on ESPN live that day at Mickey's funeral, that Mickey had indeed made the right decision and had gone to be with the Lord in Heaven the second he died--forever! I was elated!

I do not believe that anymore.