

Ernst P. Muller
Box 235
E. Setauket, N.Y.
11733

Dear Mrs. Robinson:

In reading the many tributes paid to your husband since his death, I realized how inadequate words can be to express the measurement of his contribution. The respect he earned + the debt we owe him cannot be put on paper.

Yet there is no other way to communicate our thoughts + our feelings, so we must be content, as Jackie never was, to merely speak.

Since none of the words already written have expressed my feelings, I hope that this small effort to let you know what your husband did for me will in some way be at least a partial payment for a debt I should have paid while he was alive. So many of us forgot to pay him while he was alive.

Twenty five years ago I was fourteen. Growing up in Queens in a white middle class neighborhood + in love with the Dodgers. Love, you can appreciate, is not too strong a word. In those days, we loved our ball teams, with a fervency my own children in their world could never understand.

Racial prejudice was not a part of my world. My parents were fair minded people who were at least willing to say nothing either positive or negative concerning the condition of Black's in their society. I suspect they rarely thought about it, if at all. It was the way things were in 1947. You didn't have to think about it.

Jackie Robinson introduced me to racial prejudice. During that first year when he was at Montreal, the journalistic furor that erupted around him, was my orientation to the Black condition & the White attitude. That vague intelligence I now admit that I possessed could no longer be ignored. That there were no Black major leaguers had never seemed important. I suspect that I thought that they simply were not good enough, as self-incriminating and as ridiculous as that now sounds. My alternatives evaporated. White people, a whole lot of them, did not like Black people. Some of them lived in my neighborhood, I knew that now, because I listened when they talked about Jackie. I hadn't listened before.

My decision, however, had already been made. It required no specific intellectual effort, it could be subject to no external pressures. When Jackie came to Brooklyn, he was mine. He was a Dodger. Were he purple & had he three noses, he was mine.

I can only wonder now what effect it might have had upon me had he failed. Nor do I mean failed as a ballplayer, but failed to meet the standard he had set for himself. The fact that I can only wonder is for me his monument.

At a time in my life when the shape of what I would become was vulnerable to cruel pressures, at the moment when the recognition of prejudice demanded that I decide, Jackie Robinson made it easy for me.

Baseball was not a game to me. It was a way of life. To love baseball was to love Jackie Robinson. He played this game, ~~of life~~ the way I knew it should be played. Not just with physical skills, he probably had no more of those than many & less than some, but with total devotion, with courage, with intelligence, with daring and with a matchless desire to win. But with Jackie it didn't stop there. I didn't know it then, nor had I defined it for myself until my thoughts turned back to him in the last few weeks, he played with another quality, perhaps unique to him and the circumstance with which he struggled, he played with dignity. The simple, honest dignity of a man of quality. The dignity of strength of purpose, a kind of internal grace that translated itself in his movement on the field. He stood tall and straight & strong & I felt his strength.

He was Black & I loved him. How was I as I grew to manhood ever to learn to discriminate, to draw lines between my humanity & yours? How could I ever succumb to pressures that urged me to believe in racial inferiority? I knew Jackie Robinson & he was a man & he was all the man that I could ever hope to be.

So, Mrs. Robinson, let me tell you if others haven't that your husband is a part of me because I was white & I needed his help as much as he is a part of those who were Black & needed justice. He gave

me a gift I neither deserved nor earned. He made
me a better man, than I might have been. How do
I thank him?

Sincerely,

Est P. Muller