

TAKE HEART

A Conversation in Poetry

*Edited & Introduced by Wesley McNair,
Maine Poet Laureate*

Mark Twain once remarked that the source of humor is sorrow. This observation helps to explain today's poem, in which Bob MacLaughlin of Warren remembers the influence of Marietta Mansfield on his early baseball career.

Ball Smacks Mouth, Splits Lip

by Bob MacLaughlin

Marietta Mansfield came walking up
the driveway while I was playing catch
with her brother on the grass,
so I, who had it bad for Marietta Mansfield,
looked over at her an instant before the ball
smacked me in the mouth, splitting my upper lip.

Their mother took me to Dr. Waddle, who stitched
the pieces back together well enough
for Marietta Mansfield to kiss me on that mouth
a month later in a dark ping-pong room.

The next morning I went away to summer camp,
where I played on the baseball team
and wrote letters to Marietta Mansfield
every day, and she to me, until hers stopped,
whereupon I fell into a terrible batting slump.

After camp I went off to high school in the next town,
but Marietta Mansfield was still in eighth grade
so I hardly ever saw her, ignored her when I did,
said snide things she could overhear
so she would feel as bad as I felt.

Years later, when I found out our letters
had been shortstopped by her mother,
I felt even worse.

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