

Five Minutes with Mr. Cub

Krysta Kavanaugh, 21 June 2026, 749 words

One of the best life lessons I received from my father was how to be a true blue fan—one of his finest gifts.

We never left a game before the last out—no matter the score. We never booed our players. We yelled them toward victory. My brother even played “Taps” on his trumpet whenever an opposing pitcher got pulled from the game. I roared enough for four people—really.

The most memorable player from the Chicago Cubs of the '50s and '60s was Ernie Banks, known as Mr. Cub. He's a Hall of Famer and won MVP in two consecutive years.

His favorite game day words were, “It's a great day for a ballgame. Let's play two!”

Hollering for Mr. Cub—pure childhood joy.

Imagine my surprise when three decades later and in Minnesota, I felt compelled to read the Sunday paper—and discovered that Ernie would be at the fairgrounds the following week. I didn't care about getting his autograph. I just wanted to meet him.

I thought I'd arrived early enough, only to find myself number 450. He was only on number 50. That gave me several hours to watch and strategize. He talked with people if they started the conversation, but he never initiated one himself. He signed, kept moving, and only shook hands if someone offered first.

I made a wish—five minutes of uninterrupted time with him—and a vow—a commitment to give back so he didn't feel taken advantage of.

That reminded me of Dad's lessons, so I said to my deceased father, "Dad, you taught me to be a true blue fan. I know you wanted to meet Ernie. When I shake his hand, you can slip into my body and shake it too." Given our complicated history, that invitation carried a surprising tenderness while also honoring him.

When it was my time, I shook his hand, then whipped out a picture of four Cubs from the 1969 season. Somehow my dad had finagled these Cubs to eat at our home.

I said, "This is a test. Can you name these players?" Of course he could. And now I definitely had his attention! We started talking—for half an hour.

No, I didn't hold up the line. He kept signing. We kept talking. I had crouched down so I'd be at his eye level, leaning on the table, legs stretched out behind me like a kid settling in. It was fun.

And then the day took an unexpected turn.

While I wasn't holding up the line, I thought I should leave and told him so. He didn't agree. Instead, he got up, walked around the end of the table, took me by the elbow, brought me back to his side of the table, and had me sit next to him while he signed autographs.

For the next six hours.

And that was how the afternoon began.

Here's some of the most memorable moments. He had huge hands and feet. I think two of my hands could've fit into one of his.

He asked me why I wasn't married—and decided to help me find a husband. As he scanned the line, he said, "How about that one?" or "I like him."

I was sitting there so long that people thought I was part of his entourage. They'd lean over the rope at the end of the table and ask me questions. I could answer them!

Earlier I'd asked him about the ninth regular player on the team because I couldn't remember. Later, when someone else asked the same question, he said, "Ask my wife, she knows."

I didn't ask for anything from him. I just sat next to him and laughed and talked—schmoozed. It was easy and fun. I wasn't fawning over him or starstruck into silence. I talked to him like a regular guy—even though he was my childhood hero.

I discovered he had a terrific sense of humor and liked to tease. It was a true pleasure and delight to spend that much time with him. When it was time to go, we gave each other the biggest, longest hug. I think he appreciated that I hadn't tried to take anything from him.

I realized I'd received more than I wished for—and kept my vow. I asked for a moment. Life gave me an afternoon. And I knew enough to receive it with gratitude.

