

James B. Powers (1928-2005)

Good morning. My name is Joseph Cosgriff, and I have been asked by the Powers family to represent the BLOHARDS, the legendary New York-based Red Sox fan club that Jim Powers founded, nurtured, and has ruled by the force of his personality for over forty years. (Already, I can hear the voice of Jim whispering over my shoulder, "Keep it brief, Coach!") Before I get started let me announce on behalf of Jim that Peter Collery is in the building today and will be accepting 2006 dues payments at the end of today's Mass.

Jim's passing is no simple loss for any of us to absorb or comprehend. Today marks less an attempt to share every anecdote about him than it is a starting point to ensure that the stories and his spirit continue to live on in all of us who loved him. In almost 78 years of embracing every day, he built a body of work that will stand as his legacy - his never-ending curiosity about life, his passion for all things about his baseball team, his pride in his beloved Notre Dame and, above all, the love he had for his wonderful family. These are tremendous gifts to leave behind.

A newspaper article from a couple of years ago quotes a BLOHARDS member as saying, "The BLOHARDS without Jim would be like the Vatican without the Pope." Jim always liked that one, although I have always suspected that the quote came from Jim himself. For the BLOHARDS our only president and luncheon host came directly from central casting - Fiorello LaGuardia by-way-of Uxbridge MA, although some would insist that Jim was a one-of-a-kind treasure who should only be compared to himself. Robert Sullivan of Life Magazine has done all of us a tremendous service over the years by chronicling Jim's exploits in writing, available on Time.com, in various print publications, and in his wonderful book, *Our Red Sox*.

WFAN's Ed Randall stopped by the Powers home the other night on his way to the Arizona Fall League....until someone pointed out that Scottsdale was on the other side of Greenwich. On the ride up to Weston Ed remarked that it was not only Jim's booming voice and Boston vowels that got our attention but also his choice of words that harkened back to a more romantic and bygone era. When Jim would invoke saloons and gin mills we almost believed we had become characters in a Sinatra ballad from the hat years. One particularly inspired choice of words occurred during a luncheon at which Jim's remarks were interrupted by an over-served and thrice-married BLOHARD, at which point Jim shot back with a pointed reference to the delicate issue of the heckler's "hat trick at the altar."

Unlike the new wave of BLOHARDS who believe that having seen Mo Vaughn play before he reached 280 pounds makes them old-timers, Jim's reach was the real thing, extending back to 1939 and Fitton Field in Worcester. There he

witnessed Ted Williams' first ever at-bats in New England when the Sox played an April exhibition game against Holy Cross. In addition, Jim knew Johnny Pesky since the early days of the BLOHARDS in the '60s, and Pesky always greeted him with a hug. No matter how chummy Pesky became with us, however, Jim always reminded me we should never bring up "that damn holding the ball thing."

Should you believe the BLOHARDS are no big deal (and believe me, I go back and forth on that one), try GOOGLE-ing "obituary" and "BLOHARDS." It will take some scrolling and perusing, but one soon can amass a collection of obituaries over the years that list BLOHARDS' credentials right alongside unassailable life accomplishments like Ph.Ds, charitable foundations, forty-year employment histories, and, in one case, time spent as a POW. The University of Maine Alumni Magazine just carried a death notice for someone who served honorably in WWII, was the president of a company, recorded books for the blind in his retirement...and was a member of the BLOHARDS. That obituaries so often mention the BLOHARDS tells me either a) that the average person's life falls about ten to twelve words short of filling the space needed for an obituary OR b) that being a BLOHARD means a lot to our members, especially when they are looking back on their lives. I prefer to go with the second theory.

It is almost fitting that I am in this position today because my first discussion with Jim in 1982 addressed the subject of mortality head on – specifically whether I wanted a \$10 one-year membership or the roll-of-the-dice \$100 lifetime membership. Given that the club membership demographic at the time trended older and probably didn't include a lot of two-year magazine subscribers, Jim seemed surprised to see the hundred-dollar bill, and it marked the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

To the extended Powers family – last seen tailgating behind the funeral home last night - to the grandchildren, to Bryne, Molly, Sarah, Lulu, Susan, Julie, and especially to Patty – the BLOHARDS send you our love and support, and most especially our thanks for helping to keep Jim with us for so long. Great lives always seem too brief, however long they last. As a friend emailed me last night about Jim, we can ill afford to lose the great ones, the unmistakable characters, the people who never fail to make us laugh. When I was in close proximity with Jim, particularly when he was within a quarter mile of a microphone, I truly enjoyed the anticipation that **ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN.**

And it often did. Jim wasn't just someone who told stories so much as he **WAS** the story. On a Sunday afternoon in the late '90s I invited Jim to a Yanks-Sox game in New York. If memory serves, he wore lime green pants, a red sweater under a blue blazer, a brown straw hat, and no socks.

Our seats turned out to be in the first row behind the Sox third base coach, 5'5" Wendell Kim. Though it was still early in his first season with the team, Kim had already earned the nickname "Wendell the Windmill" for his aggressive approach to his job. As you might have imagined, with nothing but about ten feet of hazy Bronx air between our seats and the coach's box, it wasn't long before Wendell and Jim were on a first-name basis.

As soon as the first batter of the first inning reached base Jim started right in: "Pick him up, Wendell. Wave 'em in. We're getting ten today, Wendell." Of course, the Sox went on to score 13 runs that day. (I also think they won.) To produce the 13 runs, Jim must have repeated the name "Wendell" five hundred or a thousand times over the three hours. Because it was a day game, presumably with more families in attendance, frustrated Yankee fans limited the projectiles aimed at Jim to the B family – plastic bottles, beer cups, and batteries – with a good 99% of them hitting me instead, which I attributed to the magic powers of the straw hat. But over a good seven innings and until the outcome was safely decided, Jim never came close to backing off his banter with Wendell, who began to make jokes to us about having to ice his money shoulder between innings. In our twenty-three years of attending games together, every experience at the ballpark with Jim was memorable and high entertainment...and we were usually part of the game!

Controversy dogged the BLOHARDS are various points in our club's history and, to no one's surprise, Jim was often at the center of it. The man Jim often referred to as "our hero," Dick Bresciani of the Red Sox, checked in on the website, mentioning Jim's habit of getting names only partially correct - thus Castiglioni, Trupiana, and Nelson Bryant for Bryant Nelson. He didn't even attempt Mientkiewicz – it was always "that jerk who won't give up the ball." Jim was in hot water with the Sox for a while for what they believed to intentional name garbling, particularly with Italian names. But based on a real-life experience, I wasn't so sure. Jim really struggled with certain names.. He had thrown a luncheon for about fifty Gannett clients in 1989, with his friend, former English professor/Yale president, and then-baseball commissioner Bart Giamatti agreeing to be the guest speaker. Jim had not only invited me to the luncheon but had asked to sit next to Giamatti at the table of honor. With Jim working the tables and schmoozing the clients I began chatting up Giamatti about *The Earthly Paradise and a Renaissance Epic*, a book of Bart's I had tried to read the night before and which gave new meaning to the words HEAVY SLEDDING. Fortunately, my driveline was derailed when Giamatti happened to pick up one of the *USA Weekend* commemorative baseballs that Jim had placed at each seat and immediately burst into a deep and convulsive laugh. Jim had printed Bart's name as GIMETTI, the same way he had always pronounced it. I still have my baseball.

In the spirit of “anything can happen,” I was privileged to appear with Jim on a television show about the BLOHARDS hosted by Al Trautwig on MSG in 2002. But I would be less than honest if I didn’t confess to a slight case of the butterflies just prior to going on the air that night. Certainly, a half-hour on TV with Jim would be a blast, but it also could go ANYWHERE, particularly were Trautwig to bring up any of about six subjects, including George Steinbrenner, Roger Clemens, watery drinks at the bar next door, or the tiny matter of allowing women on the Opening Day bus trip. Fortunately, BLOHARD and top-shelf Sox fan Howie Singer turned out to be the producer of the show, so Al’s questions were batting practice fastballs, and Jim hit them out of the park.... although I think his answer about hating the Yankees continued through the commercial and only stopped filming only when they ran out of tape. We later learned from MSG that they had received more comments about our show than any other in the series.... even if they all were negative.

What we do know that our leader stood for ANYTHING BUT mindless good taste. So in this spirit and to wrap up, let me borrow heavily from Graham Chapman and John Cleese and say that are sad to say that our fearless leader, Jim Powers IS no more. He has ceased to be. Bereft of life, he rests in peace. He’s kicked the bucket, hopped the twig, bit the dust, breathed his last, and has gone, as Henry Berry would have said, to host the great BLOHARDS Luncheon In the Sky. Cocktails are at noon.

No one was more helpful to me when my own sister passed away this summer than Jim, calling for a minute or two just about every day to check in, and making sure to deluge me with emails until my computer was ready to explode. He just have sent the joke about the O’Reilly twins at least five times, either because he lost track or because I knew how much I love that joke, especially his rendition. In closing, I cannot do better than the pilot and poet Antoine de Saint-Exupery , who wrote: “And though I cried, I was proud to have loved a man so rare.”

Since I have already committed at least five mortal sins and violated ten laws of this archdiocese in telling stories about Jim’s life, I hope that the Monsignors will allow me one more – for the man who was always gathering us and leading the applause – Let’s hear it for Jim.