

Freedom Plaza Circa 2002

There have been plenty of articles in the main stream media detailing the eventual demise of card collecting. Tied to that decline has been the rather descriptive stereo typing of a typical collector. I even recall a photo journal from a recent National depicting numerous middle-aged overweight white men, with thick glasses and receding hairlines. So on a crisp fall day in Washington DC, I headed from my office near the White House toward Freedom Plaza wondering if I would be able to pick Andy out of the crowd of folks enjoying their lunch hour and the weather.

I have two older brothers, and my mom never threw out our cards. Sometime in the early 1970s all of our cards got mixed together and there were simply too many of them to try and sort; smatterings of cards from the late 1950s and early 1960s (including a lovely pink Bob Gibson rookie) and large amounts of cards from 1965 to about 1973 purchased at the height of our childhood buying power. My 25 cent weekly allowance bought five packs of Topps—fifty cardboard heroes. But then those teenage years took over and baseball card collecting found a seat on the bench. Other than opening an occasional pack or heading to an occasional show, the hobby took a back seat to college, marriage and starting a family until the late 1990s.

EBay, the internet, and the discovery of online card trading groups reenergized the desire to complete the Topps quest (along with a few other odds and ends). It appears that I had finally found a home for some of the duplicate cards I had been moving from apartment to apartment and eventually to our house over the course of the preceding twenty years. OBC still indicated a membership cap in their bylaws but I knew it would only be a matter of time before I was the recipient and provider of RAOs.

Freedom Plaza is situated between 13th and 14th Streets with Pennsylvania Avenue abutting the south side of the stone “park.” Charles L’Enfant’s plans for Washington are depicted with a different color granite inlay in the floor of the plaza. The plaza has a history of hosting political protests—a slightly different past having nothing to do with an OBC meeting in downtown Federal City.

The stereo type descriptions failed to provide much assistance in determining who in the crowd was Andy Cook (other than both of us being bespectacled). I have to admit, time and age have diminished the memory on how we found each other, but it probably had something to do with the hard plastic 25-count card containers each of us had in our hands. Many of us have experienced the meeting of new OBC friends—instant cardboard camaraderie; a shared joy of the history of baseball; and a disdain for price guides and PSA 10 cards. We talked of card shows, auction houses, great deals, and collecting interests. We chatted about our families, our college days, and our present jobs—a rather stereo typical OBC get together.

I don’t remember what exactly I brought to hand off to Andy that autumn day, but in OBC that has never really been of paramount importance anyway (although I do remember a 1967 nose bleeder Brooks Robinson in the stack Andy exchanged with me). That first OBC meeting was simply the starting line in my OBC experience—highlighting how OBC differentiates itself from all of the other card “trading” groups. RAOs, not being fixated on guide books, surprise envelopes, and helping a fellow collector all come immediately to mind when I think of OBC—but then it is so much more: charity

auctions, NCAA and Super Bowl card pools, the X-Mas exchange, the Hall of Mediocrity all reminding us of the game of our innocent youth.

I have met numerous OBCers in the intervening ten years since my first OBC encounter. All have mimicked that first Freedom Plaza meeting. Similar people with a shared interest can only lead to great results.