

## Allison's Book Corner October 2020

***Perfect Once Removed: When Baseball Was All the World to Me,***  
by Phillip Hoose  
(Walker Books 2006)

I believe that some books find their reader, rather than the reader choosing them. And so it happened that a small book written by a successful author about himself at age nine fell into my hands.

Phillip Hoose (pronounced "Hose") is a bestselling author of young adult and children's books, several of them available at our library. But one day he chose to write a 162-page memoir about a very special time in his life and in baseball history. Imagine being a kid when many of the baseball legends were alive: Jackie Robinson, Mickey Mantle, Whitey Ford, Casey Stengel, Don Larsen, Yogi Berra.



The year was 1956, and as luck would have it, Hoose was the new kid in his Indiana town and at his school. As we all can remember, being the new kid is not easy.

Baseball was what all the boys would play at recess, and young Phil with his glasses could not play very well. You could not beat him on his baseball knowledge, but he needed some help in the outfield. His engineer father was well-meaning, but "athlete" was not his middle name.

Then one day, the miraculous occurs. Phil is in the back seat of the car reeling off baseball stats -- and complaining about his baseball skills, which are getting him teased. His mother casually says, "you should ask your cousin for some help. You know, your cousin who plays baseball for the Yankees." Well, knock him over with a feather, young Phil was shocked into an almost catatonic state: "This was news

on the order of a cure for polio or that the Russians had converted to freedom.” (Remember, it was 1956.) Don Larsen, pitcher for the New York Yankees, was indeed his second cousin. Thus began a pen pal relationship until they actually met, with free tickets to a game. Now, we could end the story there and it would still be heartwarming. Young Phil gets the encouragement he needs to improve his baseball skills and not be a laughingstock among his peers.

But it does not end there; no, folks, this is a modern fairytale come to life. The famous cousin Don Larsen achieves the extraordinary that year, pitching the only perfect game in World Series history. Indeed, Larsen’s record in that magical game still stands. For those who do not know, a perfect game means that Larsen did not allow a hit, did not walk anyone, and the Yankees did not make any errors. Baseball perfection.

Back to October 8, 1956: young Phil’s cousin Don is pitching in the World Series against the Brooklyn Dodgers. Phil runs home on his school lunch break to watch on television, but as fate would have it, witnesses only part of the perfect game. He runs back to school and hears about the outcome of the game there. The Yankees win! Phil is now a rock star among his peers. As only a nine year old boy can tell it, **even girls** come up to shake his hand on that historic day.

During these difficult days for our country, and for each of us individually, I cannot tell you how pleasant it was to read this book. It just takes you back to that short time of innocence we all get as kids -- that time when we have one thing that is so important to us personally, and seems larger than life. Rarely do we get the solution that we seek to our personal problem. But young Phil did in his cousin - an actual New York Yankee baseball player who had an extraordinary day. The world lost Don Larsen in January 2020 at the age of 90. When you have time, Google his obituary in the New York Times. Young Phil could not have written it better himself.

Phillip Hoose is still alive and successful. Check out the website of this National Book Award-winning author at [philliphoose.com](http://philliphoose.com).

