

Bleeding season.

Inspired in small part by Ernest Thayer, "Casey at the Bat."

"FIVE DOLLARS! STADIUM PARKING!" Codell hollered. There was ease in his manner and pride in his bearing. "STADIUM PARKING! FIVE DOLLARS!"

The stadium rose from Michigan and Trumbull, the Corner, the local moniker for the Detroit Tigers' home field. As sure as April heralded the arrival of spring, the Corner attracted Tiger fans and two-legged opportunists. The fans sought parking places, peanuts and popcorn; the snacks drew sparrows breeding in the overhangs at Brooks Lumber, Checker Cab, and the TIGER STADIUM PARKING billboards. Every vacant space, gas station, driveway and front yard became a source of parking lucre.

Codell worked a lot on Trumbull north of I-75 where some structure had been razed. At the driveway entrance, he waved in the automobilized Tiger fans. It was easy to spot them flowing up from the expressway ramps in slow moving, clean new cars full of Tiger regalia.

One of them rolled down his window. He and his wife and kids were all decked out in Tiger navy blue, orange and white. "Do you own this lot?" he asked Codell.

"Yes, sir," Codell said, doffing his Tiger cap.

The driver handed over a five spot. "You got the cheapest parking around!"

Codell smiled with Christian charity. "The less I charge, the sooner I fill my lot; the sooner I fill my lot, the sooner I'm done working!"

"You gonna stick around and keep an eye on the lot, aren't you?"

“Yes, sir!” Codell said.

For a second, doubt flickered in the driver’s eyes, but he wanted to believe just like he wanted to believe in his Tigers. They’d started that 1980 season losing six straight games, but hope sprang eternal. Hope was named Trammell and Whitaker, Parrish and Petry, and Mark “The Bird” Fidrych. Hope meant anything better than last year’s fifth place finish.

For Codell, 1980 was the season of hope rewarded. Directing the Tiger faithful to park in “his” lot, he was where he was meant to be. He was content with the lot to which he had been led. The cup had been poured for him; should he not drink it?

The game started at sunset and by then Codell, \$150 richer in parking charges, had already hopped an outbound bus to his neighborhood pub, the Bronx. It was Friday and the place was full, but he snagged a bar stool. The Tiger game was on TV, just starting. Codell stayed for the whole game. The Tigers blew a lead in the ninth and gave up three in the eleventh to lose. But hey, they were in it to the end! Tomorrow was a new day, a new game. The fans couldn’t wait! And neither could Codell.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was after 11 p.m. when the Tiger fans made the long walk over I-75 back to their cars. A steel cable across the driveway blocked them from leaving, and the owner of the lot and his sons were charging ten dollars a car to get out. “Fraud!” cried the maddened suburbanites - less genteel words to that effect. The owner had to call the police.

#