



TITLE: **THE GREATEST BASEBALL STORY EVER**

BOOK: **Chicken Soup for the Sports Fan's Soul**

PAGE: **199**

TIME TO READ: **1 minute**

TOPICS: **Making a Difference**
Overcoming obstacles
Sport—baseball
Heroes
Acting with kindness

AGE LEVEL: **Grades 5–9**

SYNOPSIS: **A ten-year-old polio victim makes a deal with Lou Gehrig . . . "If you hit a home run today, I'll go to therapy and learn to walk again."**

NOTES TO TEACHER:

You may need to introduce younger students to Lou Gehrig. He was an outstanding first baseman for the New York Yankees in the 1930s. He held the lifetime home run record of 493 until recently, and was the first athlete with the Yankees to have his number retired—jersey #4. Lou Gehrig is also famous for bringing ALS (*amyotrophic lateral sclerosis*) to the public eye. This debilitating disease is now commonly referred to as "Lou Gehrig's disease." For more information go to www.lougehrig.com.

Most students will also be unaware of polio. It was a widely known crippling disease in the early 1900s. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt contracted it in 1921 at the age of thirty-nine. It wasn't until 1954 that the Salk vaccine was tested and approved for use in 1955. It is almost totally eradicated at this point in time.

Chicken Soup for the Sports Fan's Soul, The Greatest Baseball Story Ever

MIDDLE SCHOOL:

PRE-QUESTIONS:

Have you ever been “motivated” with a promise or a threat?

- If so, who did it?
- What did they do?
- Why did they feel the need to motivate you?

Read Story

POST-QUESTIONS:

Who is the one person who could motivate you the most?

- Why did you choose this person?

Why did Lou Gehrig consider himself to be “. . . *the luckiest man on the face of the earth*”?
(Because young Tim had kept his promise and walked to Lou Gehrig without his crutches.)

STUDENT ACTIVITIES:

Research Lou Gehrig’s disease (ALS) and other famous people who have this disease, or who have already died from it.

Read *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom for another story of ALS.
(see Resources page 385 for full citation).

Compose new lyrics to the song “Take Me Out to the Ballgame.”

- Or write a new melody for the old lyrics.

Make a list of things that you could do to motivate another human being.

The Greatest Baseball Story Ever

*A hero is someone who has given his or her life
to something bigger than oneself.*

Joseph Campbell

In 1937, Lou Gehrig, the outstanding first baseman of the New York Yankees, was asked to go to the Children's Hospital in Chicago, while there to play the White Sox, and visit a boy with polio. Tim, ten years old, had refused to try therapy to get well. Lou was his hero, and Tim's parents hoped that Lou would visit Tim and urge him to try the therapy.

Tim was amazed to meet his hero. Lou told Tim, "I want you to get well. Go to therapy and learn to walk again."

Tim said, "Lou, if you will knock a home run for me today, I will learn to walk again." Lou promised.

All the way to the ballpark, Lou felt a deep sense of obligation and even apprehension that he would not be able to deliver his promise that day. Lou didn't knock one home run that day. He knocked two.

Two years later, when Lou Gehrig was dying with the dreaded muscular disease that to this day bears his name, on July 4, 1939, they celebrated Lou Gehrig Day at Yankee Stadium.

Eighty thousand fans, the governor, the mayor, and many other celebrities paid their respects. Lou was one of America's great heroes.

Just before the mike was turned over to Lou to respond, Tim, by this time twelve years old, walked out of the dugout, dropped his crutches, and with leg braces walked to home plate to hug Lou around the waist.

That's what Lou Gehrig meant when he exclaimed those immortal words: "Today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth."

Mack R. Douglas