

Imagination (“Man from Mars”, 2008)

Houston Hodges, for Writer’s Corner, WLRH Radio Huntsville, AL USA

When I was growing up imagination had to carry a heavier share of the load.

My mother and I played "Man from Mars," hour after hour, when I was eight or nine years old. One of us — usually she — was a Man from Mars, who was bright and articulate and curious, and knew absolutely nothing about how things worked on Earth. Didn't know why we have a 365-day calendar, didn't know why we wear colorful clothing, didn't know how a bicycle works, and needed someone to explain it to him. So the other person, the Representative of the Whole Human Race, had to explain to the Martian novice about the earth's journey around the sun and the rotation of the globe and come up with an explanation as to why we have twelve months. The bit about why we have day and night was a little easier. The curious visitor to our planet could ask question after question, delving into astronomy, mathematics, psychology, and world politics, until he was satisfied about why something is called the first of June, or October 12.

That game was so good for me, I think — and if I have wound up with any facility with the language, any skills in communication or teaching — and if I have developed any patience in trying to understand people who differ from me, I owe it to that mythical Martian. Thanks, mom!

Now it's organized and packaged. Google rules, the electronic calculator has replaced adding and subtracting, and kids check their iPods to see when it's time to come home, instead of looking to see how high the sun is in the sky. I'm not sure that's progress.

Later on the process of imagining continued to serve me well. I lived in far West Texas, a million miles from the Westernmost major league baseball team, the St. Louis Cardinals. But night by night, in my bed, with earphones tight to my ears,

there were Stan Musial and Red Schoendienst, and Bill Corum to tell me about them: "There's the windup, and the pitch!" When I finally saw my first major league game, I was in college, but it was like coming home.

Don't tell me it was only in my head. It was in my head.

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