

The first time I went to a Red Sox game I was 8. They were playing the Minnesota Twins and it was a perfect summer day.

I can't remember if they won or lost that game.

I do remember, though, exactly what it felt like to sit in a seat in Fenway Park.

Three weeks after turning in my book report for the Read Your Way to Fenway program at the Boston Public Library, I was sitting in a seat in the grandstands, Fenway Frank in hand. I don't even like hot dogs, but it's still one of the best meals I've ever had.

I grew up in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, one of the 21 neighborhoods of Boston and about 30 minutes from Fenway Park. I've been a member of Red Sox Nation since the day I was born.

In other cities, you get a choice of sports teams. Not so in Boston. In a city infamous for giving each other the cold shoulder, we're united in our passionate love affair with the Boston Red Sox.

I've fought the Evil Empire, watched balls sail over the Green Monster, joined the rest of the Fenway Faithful in cheering for the boys of summer, even when they let us down.

Because being a fan of the Red Sox means sometimes we have to accept defeat. But we're always in it together.

On October 20, 2004, I was at the local Catholic school's football game. Out of the 500 people there, I think about 20 of them were still in the bleachers watching the football game. The rest of us were in the parking lot, squished 20 deep, watching the last of a seven game series between the Red Sox and the Yankees on a 14-inch TV perched precariously on top of a van and plugged in via at least 5 extension cords. Even some of the football players had wandered over to watch the game.

At 12:01 AM on October 21, the Boston Red Sox defeated the New York Yankees 10-3, clinching the American League Championship and earning their spot in the 2004 World Series. I didn't know the person next to me, but with tears of disbelief and shrieks of joy we hugged for about 5 minutes, and we certainly weren't the only ones.

It didn't matter that we had come to watch football. It didn't matter that we didn't know each other. The Red Sox had won. *Boston* had won. And we were a part of that.

Because that night, it wasn't just about baseball.

It was about sitting in a football stadium on a cold October night with 500 other people who were desperately hoping for the same thing you were.

It was about your parents' memories of hot July afternoons around the grill, listening with bated breath to the game on the radio.

It was about old South Boston grandfathers who had hoped against hope for a World Series win, just once in their lifetime.

It was about the fans that travelled hundreds of miles to make sure that the Red Sox knew, even at away games, they were never truly away from home.

It was a symbol of hope, not just for a baseball win, but for the possibility of a bright new future, for our city and for each other.

It sounds a little bit silly to put that much stock in the fervor Red Sox fans have for their team. But to us, and to the players, it does make a difference.

On March 10, 2010, shortstop Nomar Garciaparra signed a one-day contract with the Boston Red Sox. For 9 years, he had been a hero of the Red Sox bench, and many a Boston heart was broken when he was traded in the middle of the 2004 season. But when he was ready to retire, there was only one way it would feel right.

As a member of the Boston Red Sox and as a member of Red Sox Nation.

I am a proud member of Red Sox Nation.

I am a part of something that stretches back to my grandfather's childhood and beyond, something that unites people of all ages and brings families together.

Growing up in Red Sox Nation means upholding a tradition that has been passed down for generations.

It means showing up to the game, even if it's snowing, in April.

It means staying up until 2 in the morning in August when the Sox are on the West Coast.

It means sitting on a seat in Fenway Park all the way into the depths of October.

It means being a part of a team that ultimately never lets you down.

It means being a Red Sox fan.