

## “Inspiration” by Kay Towle

I was nine the last time I saw her. She had been visiting for a week, and I had a ball game to play with the guys right before it was time for her train, so I said goodbye as I left and she gave me a big hug. I still remember the sparkle in her eyes, and the way she told me to hit one out of the park for her. None of us knew the unsolved mystery that would haunt our family from that day on.

I learned later that she never made it home. The picture my mother took in front of our house was the last photograph we got of her. The police took a copy when she didn't show up at her job in the city, when they started asking her employer and friends where she'd been. They showed it around, but no-one remembered seeing a young pretty brunette get off the train in Memphis. She just disappeared. It broke my mother's heart, her baby sister lost. We kids mourned the loss of an aunt who was fun-loving and doted on us, our favorite one to have visit us. My mother cried for days, and as the months went on with no word, she became quieter and more introspective. She always wanted to know where we were, and who we were with even when we were teens. It was especially hard for her to let us leave home when it came time for college. She never quite got over the tragedy and insecurity of losing someone she loved in that way.

For myself, I missed my funny aunt, and turned my grief into a determination to follow her last instructions. You might say my career began from that incident, because in every subsequent game I was absolutely committed to hitting one out of the park for Aunt Nell. It became my mantra for baseball, and resulted in many hours of practice to hone my skills. Even today, as I look back on my pro ball years, I can see the influence of her last statement to me.

People can be inspired by love, fear, an example or mentor, or a life-changing incident. All my life, in whatever task I attempted, I wanted to do my best—to “hit it out of the park” for my beloved Aunt Nell. I hope she's gotten to see a few of the times I truly accomplished the goal she set for me. I also hope in the great baseball game of life, I've racked up the points to be in the heavenly hall of fame someday. If I make it, I want a big victory hug from Aunt Nell.

\*\*\*