

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

On Losing Kobe

Eric · Wednesday, January 29th, 2020

Every weekday morning I wake up at 5:45 a.m., to carve out 45 minutes for myself in the bathroom (ok, on the toilet) — before I start my daily “personal homework routine” with my still English-learning, almost 13 year old, son... alternating spelling with dictation, and every morning, reading: “Charlotte’s Web”, “The BFG”... parents, you know the list.

Ok, I sit on the toilet and read the newspaper. The old fashioned way – turning the pages to find what I want to read. I have to be judicious, with just 45 minutes at hand. I look at the headlines, page 2 & 3, a bit of foreign affairs, the back editorial pages, but mostly... the sports pages.



You see, I’m a lifelong sports fan. Maybe unusual for an artist, but hey, I am. No apologies. In my childhood, it was [Mickey Mantle](#) and the New York Yankees and Cassius Clay winning the 1960 Olympic Gold Medal, Then [Muhammad Ali](#) battling for the heavyweight belt in “The Thrilla in Manila,” “The Rumble in the Jungle”; I saw them all.



Then when I moved to LA, half a lifetime ago, it became Magic Johnson and then Kobe Bryant with the Los Angeles Lakers. Magic and Kareem. Kobe and Shaq. Kobe and Pau. 5 NBA championships for Kobe! 18 All Star games. Two Olympic Gold Medals. The sky was the limit for this immortal.



Not unusual, I admit. To root for your favorite player and the home team that wins world championships year after year.

Sports heroes are the closest thing we have in the modern world — to the Greek gods. Or at least I think so in America. Instead of Ajax, Agamemnon, and Achilles, we had Mantle and Mays in baseball, and we had Michael, Magic, and Kobe in basketball (with LeBron now in the pantheon). All one word gods! No mo’ explanation needed.



Athletes we love are also, in a way, our “best friends”, practically... “members of our family.” Our brothers, sometimes our sisters, in arms. We watch them win, lose, succeed, fail, get injured, rehab

and recover – season after season, year after year. We see them grow up in front of our eyes, mature, sometimes get traded, always get exorbitant amounts of money, eventually lose their powers and retire. We cheer. We jeer. We post. Because... we love them.

But of course — this love is only a one way street. And that’s what’s so strange about it. Because our heroes don’t even know we exist, at least personally. Yet we still hope... that the great ones, Magic, Michael, Kobe – will love us back. See us. Hear us. Thank us for our devotion. Our loyalty. At least collectively. After all, we are their lifelong FANS. We have internalized them – into our psyches, into our hearts, our minds... having seen them at their super-human best, and at their heart-breaking worst. We’ve talked about them and defended them in front of endless water coolers. Argued about them on countless couches. Drunk to them in our favorite sports bars.

I used to come home from work at USC, sometimes after 8 hours of teaching sweaty, exhausting movement classes, without a lunch break, and I’d turn on the Laker games. KCAL channel 9 or 11, whatever local station was carrying the game before the cable-ization and streamification of tv, It was such a wonderful distraction and escape from the “real” world, to watch your favorite heroes slug it out for primacy, for “the thrill of victory, the agony of defeat.” Give me sports, not politics or war.

So this morning, the dictation was. “Today is Monday. Exsel didn’t sleep well and is in a bad mood. Yesterday Kobe Bryant and his 13 year old daughter, Gianna, both died in a helicopter crash. (H-e-l-i-c-o-p-t-e-r) Which do you think is more substantial (s-u-b-s-t-a-n-t-i-a-l)?

via GIPHY

Exsel looked at me and he started to cry. I’m not sure if it was that he hadn’t slept enough, or if he got the point of the first part of the dictation. But I can say that his mood did pick up, and that he asked if we could go to Staples Center today after school to be part of the Kobe tribute and memorial.



Then I went on my daily walk with Cassius, the dog, in the flat green grasses of Elysian Park. (Yes, he’s named after my childhood hero.) The green grasses are parted like the Red Sea by a 2 foot wide, very shallow, concrete drainage ditch, to catch the rains and carry them to the downhill gardens. It hadn’t rained last night, but the ditch was full of water, and there were so many worms on display, flacidly lying about every 3 feet I walked. It was so odd.

It felt like the Heavens had opened up and cried for Kobe last night, and the worms were the closest thing the gods could offer to Kobe, the “Black Mamba,” the wriggling and lethal snake, who would, and could, do anything necessary to win. Maybe the worms weren’t as single-minded, as absolutely conscious, and as completely-confident as Kobe was. But I think it was the universe’s way, Elysian Park’s way, of shouting out a “thank you” to our fallen hero.

I wondered as I walked, “why?” Why wasn’t it ME who had crashed and burned? Even me and Exsel, my almost 13 year old son? Why was Kobe and his beloved 13 year old daughter? I wondered why life was so arbitrary. So fragile. So sudden and final.

Kobe was indeed a hero. An LA icon. He was invincible. He couldn’t be dead.

He was a God. An Achilles (with the same Achilles heel injury that ended his basketball domination). He was only 41 years old. I was 72. He had accomplished so much. Inspired so many. He was beloved by the whole City. The entire sports world. Maybe the whole *world*.

Here I was walking in the green, green park; the sun was shining, the worms were worming, the planet was the same. How could that be?

Maybe life is just... unfair. Maybe there's no explanation for "why" our hero has fallen. Been taken away from us. In his prime. Long before his time.

But still... we must honor him. Just like in the times of old. Offer him tribute. Offer him thanks.



By being better ourselves. By demanding more of ourselves... like he did. Maybe not all becoming champions; still we must cherish our families, love our children, give them our best... make them smile... just like he did.

That's why I love the "smiling" photos of Kobe. The post basketball ones. The family ones. The relaxed, embracing-his-daughter, Gianna ones.

Sure, I am amazed by the warrior "primal scream" one. The victorious champion one. The humbled and embarrassed sex-accusation one.

But out of all of my hero's images, I prefer the ones where he's learned some grace, some humility, and some love.



It's a lesson we could all stand to learn. And one thing more we can thank Kobe for.

R.I.P. Kobe Bryant, 1978-2020

"He dared to touch the sun."

More about Trules on his [Website](#)

Listen to his podcast, "e-travels with e. trules" [HERE](#)

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