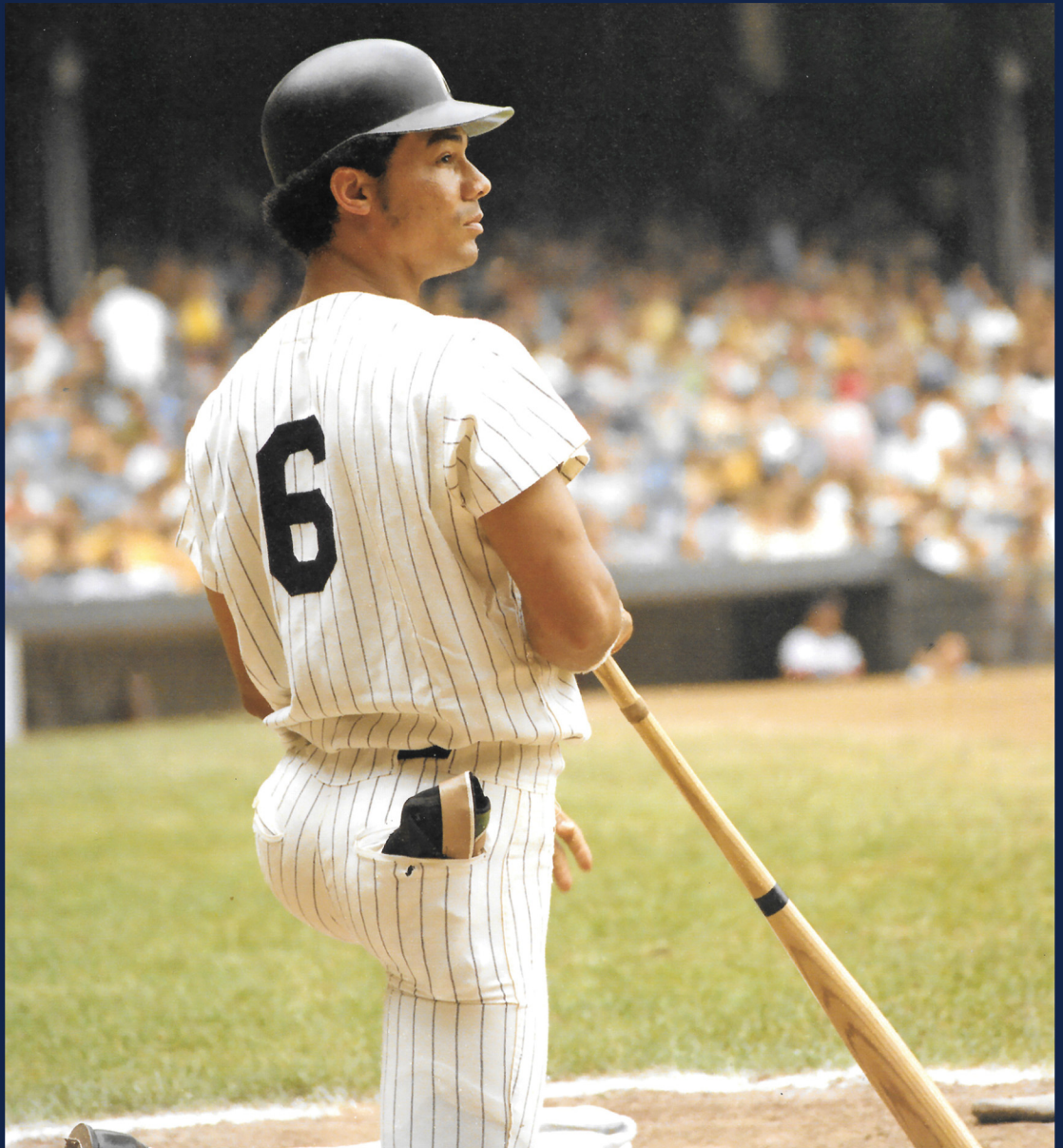


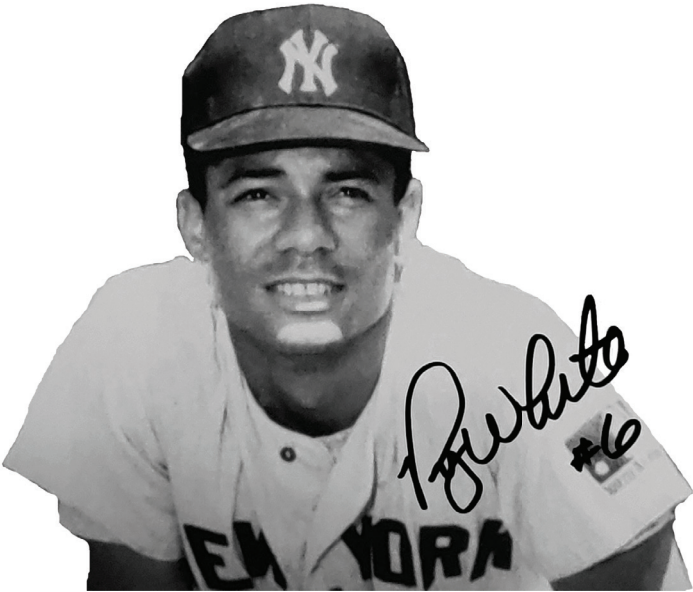
ROY WHITE

From Compton to the Bronx

Foreword by Marty Appel



with Paul Semendinger



Advance Praise for **ROY WHITE: From Compton to the Bronx**

“Roy White is as dignified a Yankee as there has ever been, one of the many reasons a generation of fans (myself included) grew up imitating his stance. Paul Semendinger does a masterful job capturing the essence of the great left fielder. This is a must-read about the most underrated Yankee of all time.”

Ian O’Connor, four-time New York Times bestselling author of *The Captain: The Journey of Derek Jeter*

“Reading *Roy White: From Compton to the Bronx* is like sitting in a comfortable leather recliner with a cold beverage, listening intently as the Yankee star shares his life story. His rise to stardom was at times a long slog, but determination and moral courage eventually won out. When I put this book down, I knew that what this world needs is more men like Roy White, not just as athletes but as inspirations for future generations.”

Alan D. Gaff, author of *Lou Gehrig: The Lost Memoir* and *Field of Corpses*

“In *Roy White: From Compton to the Bronx*, we get the inside story from someone who experienced the highs and lows of being a Yankee like few others. This honest, revealing autobiography tells the story of one of the most underappreciated players in New York baseball history, while adding insight from those who know him best. Whether you remember watching games from the Bronx Zoo era or have only recently come to enjoy the game, this book is a must for any baseball fan.”

Chris Donnelly, author of *Doc, Donnie, the Kid, and Billy Brawl: How the 1985 Mets and Yankees Fought For New York’s Baseball Soul*

“More than the autobiography of a great player, a revealing portrait of a great man, and a paean to dedication, hard work, and decency.”

JB Manheim, author of *The Cooperstown Trilogy*

“The Baseball Gods must have loved watching Roy White play the game of baseball. I really enjoyed reading this book!”

Jonathan A. Fink, author of *The Baseball Gods are Real* and *The Republic Baseball League*

“Roy White traversed a path through the baseball world unlike any other before or since. From Compton to the Bronx is the expertly-told story of his fascinating baseball journey and a portrait of the American dream itself.”

Daniel R. Epstein, Co-Director of the Internet Baseball Writers Association of America

“*Roy White: From Compton to the Bronx* reads the way Roy played the game: with class, professionalism and a love for baseball—and no theatrics, braggadocio, scandals or egomania. Kudos to White and Paul Semendinger for telling White’s story in a conversational, insightful, fun style. As a Kansas City Royals fan, *Roy White: From Compton to the Bronx* makes me feel kinda bad for rooting so hard against him all those years.”

Johnny D. Boggs, author of *Sports on Film: Hollywood History* and the “Baseball Westerns” *Camp Ford, The Kansas City Cowboys and Buckskin, Bloomers and Me*

“These fascinating stories, rare historic photos and amazing little-known facts about one of the Top 10 Yankees of all-time, Yankee Legend Roy White, will astonish you. *Roy White: From Compton to the Bronx*, an autobiography, is a best-seller in the making. It’s the perfect gift for major baseball fans worldwide. Fact: After the 1973 season, karate-do became Roy’s secret ‘confidence’ weapon during off-season training. This page-turner is filled with lots of ah-hah moments and feel-good conversations with Yankee greats such as Joe DiMaggio, Mickey Mantle, Reggie Jackson, Willie Randolph, Goose Gossage, Thurman Munson, and many others. This book is a valuable keepsake and grand-slam homerun!”

Grandmaster Andrew Linick, Publisher: Official Karate Mag., Martial Arts Pioneer, The U.S. Ambassador of Karate™, and International Best-Selling Author: *Nunchaku, Karate’s Deadliest Fighting Sticks, 3rd Edition*.

“Yankee fans who grew up in the 1970s love Roy White because of the way he played the game and carried himself. Reading Roy White’s story gives fan’s an even deeper appreciation for the man behind the Number 6, how he overcame adversities and became a champion--and doing it all with class and humility that make him a true role model. This is a terrific read filled with great memories that truly inspire.”

Robert Skead, author of *Something to Prove, the Great Satchel Paige Versus the Rookie Joe DiMaggio*

“Whitey Ford called Roy White ‘the most underrated and underappreciated Yankee of all-time.’ White could hit, get on base, steal, score a lot of runs and masterfully patrol left field. He is one of the few players to spend 15 seasons with the Yankees. He played in 1,881 games, 7th all-time among Yankees. He also played in three World Series (1976, 1977 and 1978).

Never a flashy or vocal player, White’s value to the Yankees was often overlooked. He was quiet, professional and classy. Author Paul Semendinger, and others, make the point that White deserves a spot in Monument Park at Yankee Stadium.

From Compton to the Bronx provides insights into White and his career with the Yankees as a player, coach and executive, as well as his rise through the minors while battling racism and his three-year stint playing for the Yomiuri Giants in Japan.

As a result of this autobiography, White, hopefully, will receive the recognition he deserves.”

Barry Sparks, author of *Frank Home Run Baker: Hall of Famer and World Series Hero*

“The Red Sox’ succession of left fielders—Ted, Yaz, Rice, Manny—is well-known. But their Yankee counterparts? Not so much. But now, thanks to Paul Semendinger, we get the autobiography of Roy White, the gentlemanly All-Star who for years graced the vast acreage of Yankee Stadium’s outfield. There may be a lot to learn about this overlooked position in Yankee history, but *Roy White: From Compton to the Bronx* is a damn good place to start.”

David Ostrowsky, Atlanta Jewish Times

ROY WHITE:
From Compton to the Bronx

By
Roy White

with Paul Semendinger



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Foreword

By Marty Appel

*Marty Appel, a Yankee historian and former public relations official with the team, is the author of *Pinstripe Empire, Munson, and Casey Stengel.**

PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICIALS AT Major League teams, of which I was one, tend to deal with the biographical material you find on the backs of baseball cards.

Date of birth, place of birth, height, weight, bats, throws, and the traditional baseball card stats we have long been familiar with.

The birth of Baseball-Reference.com has increased our knowledge by adding schooling, draft information and other baseball necessities.

When Roy White joined the Yankees, we took care of business and handled the need-to-know items.

We didn't look forward—to his becoming the greatest left fielder in the history of the New York Yankees—and we didn't look backwards. We didn't ask, "Are you the product of an interracial marriage? Were your parents divorced? Was your family on welfare? Was your mother an alcoholic? Was your father absent for your childhood? Did you grow up in a tough neighborhood? Did you have street fights? Did you ever spend time in jail? Were you ever beaten up? Did you carry a weapon?"

Those weren't subjects likely to be covered in the Yankees Yearbook.

Even if those questions were appropriate—and they

weren't—you wouldn't go there while having a conversation with Roy. He was quiet, unassuming, classy, professional, serious, and dignified. I remember that he would lug a record player on road trips (long before MP3), where he would room with Horace Clarke and play jazz in the room. It was hardly an activity that made one wonder where this guy grew up!

When I was writing about him once, long after we had both moved on, I learned that he was a member of street gang. It seemed so out of place.

"What were you, the recording secretary?" I asked. "You kept the minutes?"

I'm sure Roy was not the only Major League player who, when you peeled back the onion, you found there so much more to learn. Even if I had that knowledge, and could have tipped off a writer to ask about those things, it still would have felt like an invasion of his privacy.

And truth be told, many, many players had lives that were less than Little League to the Majors with the Cleaver family waiting at home with dinner.

The fact was, everyone liked Roy White. There wasn't a more likeable member of the team. He and his beautiful wife Linda were guests at my 1975 wedding. I loved that they made the long trip. When our son was born, we visited their New Jersey home and enjoyed the day with their kids.

As the years moved on and he stayed with the team, appreciation rose. He was on his way to becoming a very senior member of this storied franchise, one who broke in while Mickey Mantle, Whitey Ford and Roger Maris were on the team, and one who stayed to be teammates with Thurman Munson, Reggie Jackson, Catfish Hunter and Willie Randolph. Of all the inspiring stories that arose from those Yankee teams of the late '70s, Roy hitting a big home run in the 1978 ALCS warmed the hearts of everyone who had been there through the tough years of 1965-75. He got to see the promised land.

How many others would spend at least 15 seasons in the Major Leagues, all with the Yankees? By the end of Roy's playing career there were only five others—Lou Gehrig, Bill Dickey, Frank Crosetti, Mickey Mantle, and Whitey Ford.

(Later Derek Jeter, Jorge Posada, Mariano Rivera, and Bernie Williams joined this small club.)

The question of naming a team's "all-time team" gets sidetracked on the Yankees by having Ruth, DiMaggio and Mantle as the outfielders, disregarding the left-center-right matter. Of the three, only Ruth played some left field, depending on the sun. Usually, he was in right. But if the question is specifically tied to that difficult acreage known as "death valley"—left field of Yankee Stadium—to me, Roy emerges on top. Others who would be in the discussion would be Bob Meusel, Charlie Keller, Dave Winfield and Hideki Matsui, but none had Roy's longevity, or indeed, consistency playing just that outfield position. He mastered it. He played a full season errorlessly out there. He dealt with the sun field that was left field in Yankee Stadium, and he led all left fielders in assists twice, in fielding percentage five times, and in putouts eight times. As sportswriter Bryan Hoch points out, among Yankee left fielders he is first in plate appearances, at bats, runs, hits and walks, while placing second in doubles, home runs, RBIs and stolen bases.

The home runs always seem to catch us by surprise, because he was not a big muscle-bound slugger but a lithe, fast-footed athlete who often choked up at the plate. (*SPORT* magazine once ran a story titled "The Yankees have a Clean Up Hitter Who Chokes Up.") And before the proliferation of switch hitters in the game's current era, he was among the all-time switch-hitting leaders in home runs. And in homering from both sides of the plate in the same game, on the Yankees there was Mantle (10 times), and White (five times). Posada (7), Mark Teixeira (7) Williams (6) and Nick Swisher (5) are a part of the current long ball era.

He even set a single-season American League sacrifice fly record of 17 in 1971, which has lasted more than half a century without being surpassed. We gave him a plaque for that one, thinking there are no such plaques generally presented. That is clutch hitting.

For a PR guy like myself, Roy was a dream. Did we need someone to shake hands and pose for pictures with some

sponsors on the field, which required him to get dressed in full uniform long before he needed to? Roy was our go-to guy. Did we need someone to record some promos for our out-of-town radio network? Roy would bring that late-night deep disk jockey voice to the microphone, and it was like we were dealing with James Earl Jones or Morgan Freeman.

Were there pre-game autographs to sign for kids by the railing? There was a good chance Roy was among those answering the call.

When he went to Japan at the end of his Major League career, he had a chance to be a teammate of the legendary Sadaharu Oh, as he had been to Mickey Mantle. No one else could make that claim, and I could see Roy's inner Zen guiding him through his time there. I imagine his respect for the game as well as his respect for teammates made him much admired, and he won a Japanese World Series as he had won our World Series, (twice,) also a unique accomplishment.

When people talk about those two Yankee seals of approval, the plaque in Monument Park and the retired number, I nod in agreement. As for retiring his number, the Yankees did retire number six for Joe Torre—even though he usually wore a jacket, and few could tell you what his number was! It feels like it could have been retired for both, as "8" is for Berra and Dickey. The plaque? Well, his time may come. We hope it does.

Introduction

By Paul Semendinger, Ed.D.

I ALWAYS WANTED TO be a New York Yankee. I'm in my mid-fifties now, still pitching in two baseball leagues, and still hoping the Yankees decide to take a chance on me. Baseball is in my blood and has been since I was eight years old watching the Yankees on television and falling in love with the game, the players, the stories, and so much more.

The 1977 Yankees players are all legends to me. Superheroes. They are all larger than life. I grew up watching Reggie Jackson, Willie Randolph, Thurman Munson, Ron Guidry, Graig Nettles, Chris Chambliss, Bucky Dent, Sparky Lyle, Mickey Rivers, Lou Piniella, Roy White, and so many others. They were my heroes. They were superheroes. Still are.

All I knew about baseball back then was that it was a wonderful game, that the Yankees were great, and that they always won the World Series. I loved them all. My favorite player was Graig Nettles. It might have been Roy White, but he was already taken.

In 1977, the coolest person on TV was Fonzie. I grew up across the street from two teenage twin boys who were both as cool to me as The Fonz. The Twins (as I knew them) were Yankees fans. Their favorite player was Roy White. They idolized him. As such, I did as well. But I guess they talked about baseball with my sister first. She was older than me and she claimed Roy White as her own. By the logic of childhood, I couldn't have the same favorite player as my older sister. Still, Roy White stood atop that pedestal reserved for our childhood heroes. He couldn't be my favorite, but he was still a favorite. Roy White stood on that pedestal of greatness. This

is where we put the heroes of our youth. It's where Roy White resides today. And where he'll reside always and forever in my memories and in my heart.

We don't usually get the chance to meet our heroes. Often, if we do, we find they aren't like we hoped. Somehow our heroes fall short in so many ways. Many do. Maybe most. But not all. Some heroes turn out to be better people than we would have thought. Roy White turned out to be a better human being than I could have ever hoped or imagined.

It was late in 2021. I was still an elementary school principal at the time, working through my final year before retirement. I had written a few books. I had won a few writing awards. I ran a successful Yankees blog and was a frequent contributor on some baseball and sports podcasts. But in the world of writing and big media and all of that, I was a nobody.

My friend John "Mac" McGrath introduced me to Roy, sort of. He had interviewed Roy White for a podcast on the North East Streaming Sports Network. I was unable to participate, but I asked Mac to speak to Roy and to let him know that I would be happy to write his autobiography. I, and so many others, have always felt that Roy White's story needed to be told. Mac did just that, and the next thing I knew, he sent me Roy White's phone number.

One thing led to the next, we texted back and forth, and then Roy actually called me one day as I was driving home from work. After quickly recovering from shock, I pulled off on a side street and I told him of my hopes to write his story. Amazingly, a few days later, after thinking it over, he agreed. The next thing I knew, we were talking regularly on the phone and meeting at our favorite location, Panera Bread, to talk about his career, the Yankees, and more. Roy White and I met often. He'd talk. I'd ask questions and type as quickly as I could. Within seven or eight months, the initial draft of this manuscript was completed.

Every single time we met, Roy White was kind and humble and patient and accommodating. I never wanted to be a

fan, I always wanted to be just me, the writer. I never wore a Yankees shirt or hat, although sometimes Roy White did. As we talked, we'd laugh. He'd tell great stories about my childhood heroes (and his heroes as well) and as he did, I just kept trying to get it all down and not miss a thing.

Who is Roy White as a person? I have a few stories that I believe illustrate who he is. First, he trusted me, and I'm not sure why, to write his story. This is a great honor for me. I had never before been befriended by a Major League Baseball player. And this was no ordinary player – this was a Yankees legend and a childhood hero. This was Roy White. Sometimes legends only associate with legends. It's rare that one gives an unknown a shot at something great. But Roy White did.

Even today, Roy White is extremely popular. The cheers for him at Old Timer's Day at Yankee Stadium often ring the loudest. When people recognize him, they go out of their way to tell him how much he means to their lives – even today and even from afar. Roy White's phone rings often – from all sorts of people who seek a story or a quote, or from old teammates and friends. Roy White remains extremely busy, yet, out of blue on Father's Day I received a text from him wishing me a great day. This famous ballplayer took time from his day to remember me. That's class.

As I stated, when we met, I tried to never be a fan. I was always the writer. I never asked for a photo together. I never asked for an autograph for myself. I did, though, ask for one favor. One of the twins from my childhood came down with colon cancer. I broke my own rule and asked Roy White to sign a card for him. Roy did this gladly. (When I gave the card to my old neighbor, his eyes filled with tears. It was that meaningful to him.)

In July 2022, I was interviewed about my Yankees book, *The Least Among Them*, on Pat Williams' radio program. As we talked, he told me the following story:

Pat Williams began his professional sports career as a minor league baseball player. In his first game as a professional, his team was playing against the Ft. Lauderdale Yankees. This was a game in the lowest level of the minor leagues. In Williams'

first at bat, he struck out on three pitches. In his second at bat, he struck out on three pitches again. Things certainly were not going well for him. In his third at bat, he found himself down with no balls and two strikes. He was one pitch away from striking out for the third time, on only nine total pitches. He then swung at the next offering and connected and went to second base with a double. The second baseman on that Yankees team came over to congratulate him and welcome him to pro baseball. That player, the one who first made Pat Williams feel like a pro, the one who gave him some of his first words of encouragement, was Roy White. That's who Roy White was. And it is who he still is today.

I have talked to a host of people about Roy White, some of whom are quoted in this book—former players, executives, coaches, and fans. The same words are said over and over. I'm told about what a kind and decent human being Roy White is. I'm told what a gentleman he is. I'm told about what a great baseball player he was—and what he meant to the Yankees and the fans. He was the single player who covered the era between the great Yankees teams of the 1960s and the World Championship Yankees of the late 1970s. Roy White was the only player to play for the Yankees for the entire decade of the 1970s. He is a Yankees legend. (And I believe it is unconscionable that he has not been recognized with a plaque in Monument Park in Yankee Stadium.)

But the word that people use most often when talking about Roy White is “class.”

That word defines him perfectly. Roy White is class. Roy White is, simply, a quiet, dignified, exceptional human being. That's class. That's Roy White—a true gentleman, a legend of the game, a Yankee. He was a Yankees legend, but he is an even better person.

This is his story. This is the story of Roy White.

I am honored that I had the opportunity to write this with him.

Prologue

My Greatest Baseball Memory

I HAD AN EXTREMELY memorable baseball career full of many great moments. There were so many highlights that I sometimes find it difficult to recount them all, but when I stop to think about it, they all come back, slowly, one by one. I have been blessed to have lived the life that I have. Baseball, of course, has been a big part of who I was and who I still am.

People often ask me to recount my greatest baseball memory. Some who remember me ask me about specific moments. I'll list a few here, all of which were great and are dear memories, but none of which ranks as my greatest memory.

- In my first Major League game, I singled in my first at bat (off Dave McNally of the Orioles). I later scored on a base hit by Tom Tresh. That was in 1965.
- I became known as an outfielder, but I played second base in my first big league starting assignment, a game in which I had two hits.
- The next year (1966), I hit my first big league homer off Sam McDowell (who would one day be my teammate).
- I batted fourth, behind the great Mickey Mantle. I was there to protect him in the batting order.
- I was a two-time American League All-Star.
- I once went an entire season (1971) without making an error in the field. I was the first Yankee to do that!
- I played in the World Series in 1976, 1977, and 1978. We won the World Series, of course, in 1977 and 1978.
- I had some big post season hits including the game winning home run to win the American League

Championship Series in 1978 and another home run in the 1978 World Series.

- It was my bat that Bucky Dent used to hit his famous home run in Boston (also in 1978).
- In Japan, I got to play alongside the great Sadaharu Oh. Once again, I hit fourth in the batting order to protect Japan's greatest home run hitter.
- I am one of only two players in baseball history to play for a winning team in the World Series and the Japan Series (which we won in 1981).
- I served as a Major League Coach and as a front office executive.
- I helped found the Roy White Foundation to assist high school graduates with some of the costs associated with attending college
- Even today, more than forty years after my last Major League baseball game, fans approach me and tell me that they loved the way I played the game.

I'll tell those stories and many more over the pages of this book. This is my story, the story of my life and my baseball journey. I am glad to have the chance to share it with you.

As for my greatest baseball memory, well, it was something a bit simpler than just hitting a home run, making a catch, or being part of something memorable. My greatest baseball memory was when I walked into the Yankees clubhouse in Yankee Stadium in 1965 as a player for the very first time. I walked in and looked around the room. I saw Mickey Mantle, Whitey Ford, Elston Howard and Roger Maris. When I was a kid in Little League, I was watching these players. I had their baseball cards. And now, here I was, one of them. I was a big leaguer. I was a New York Yankee.

I remember Tom Tresh, who had been the American League Rookie of the Year in 1962, coming over to me and stating that he was glad that I was part of the team. Phil Linz and then other players did so too.

These weren't just any baseball players; these were the New York Yankees. The great New York Yankees. These

From Compton to the Bronx

Yankees had been to the World Series the previous year, and the year before that, and the year before that too. These were the Yankees that had been to the World Series 14 times in the previous 16 years. This wasn't just a great team... these players were part of the greatest dynasty of all time.

And there I was, now part of it. I was welcomed by these players into their locker room as an equal member of this distinguished squad. I soon got to know all of these players personally. I was a New York Yankee.

What could be greater than that?

Chapter 1

From Compton...

1943-1961

IT TAKES A LOT of hard work to make it to the Major Leagues. It takes even more work to be an All-Star, and a World Champion, and to play in the big leagues for fifteen seasons, but it all has to start somewhere. My start came on the streets in Los Angeles and Compton. It wasn't an easy beginning.

I was born in Los Angeles, California on December 27, 1943, into a mixed-race family. My father, Marcus White, was of German, Austrian, and Czech descent. He was an artist and would become a well-known one at that. My mother, Margaret, was African American. As I look back on my parents' marriage, I realize that this couldn't have been easy for them. Mixed-race families were not common in the 1940s. In fact, possibly in order to allow them to get married, my father listed his race on the marriage certificate as negro. My parents were decades, if not a century (in many regards), ahead of their time. As I said, this could not have been easy on them, and it wasn't. Because of the societal pressures they faced, they were not able to make the marriage last.

A few years before my parents divorced, I had a big health scare. I contracted polio. This was when I was six or seven years old. I was fortunate in that my grandmother was a nurse's aide, so she knew the signs of this terrible disease. It all started innocently enough. I came home from school complaining of a fever and a headache along with a good deal of fatigue. My grandmother immediately recognized these troubling signs and called an ambulance. The next thing I

knew, I was in the hospital where I would stay for the next few months. The doctors and the nurses gave me daily injections of penicillin to help me recover. I missed so much school that when I returned, they put me back a grade. Fortunately, I was able to catch back up and they returned me to second grade where I belonged. I was also very fortunate in that I had no lasting effects from the polio.

Once my parents were divorced, we moved around a lot. My mom was on welfare—public assistance. It was tough for her to make ends meet as my mom was an alcoholic. By the time I was eight or nine-years-old, we'd settled in Compton on 131st Street. This is where I really started to play ball. We didn't have a lot of money; public assistance did what it could and my mom worked a bit by raising German Shepherds. There were always a few dogs in the house. I remember that she was able to sell the puppies for \$30 each. It was never easy, though. But she loved us and supported us as best as she could.

I never grew up with us having much money. In fact, often-times we had little to none. I remember being home when the bill collectors from the county would come and we couldn't answer the door because they'd be asking us to pay bills that we couldn't pay. The same was true of the electric company. There were weeks when we were without lights because my mom didn't have enough money to pay the bills.

Each year for school, I was given just a few pairs of pants and a couple of shirts. If I needed a new pair of pants, and I didn't do this often, I'd shoplift them. There wasn't another way. I did this out of necessity. Thank God, I never got caught. I had just one pair of shoes. Those shoes also had to last all year. Some years, I'd have to tape my shoes to keep them together.

We never had a lot to eat as well. For lunch, when I brought lunch to school (sometimes I'd get lunch in the cafeteria), I often had a mayonnaise sandwich—just mayo and bread. The other staple I had was bologna and cheese. By the time I was in high school, I worked in the school's cafeteria. Those years I would always have a lunch to eat. The one day of the year when we would have food was Thanksgiving. I always looked

forward to the turkey and all the trimmings. This wasn't just a special day on the calendar for us to eat a lot, it was the only day we could eat a lot.

My mom didn't make any of us kids work. My sister Sonja was a few years older than me, and I had a little brother, Bruce, who was also naturally athletic. Even though things weren't easy, my mom encouraged us all to be athletic. We all took dance lessons at one point or another. My mom also let me play as much as I wanted. And I played a lot of baseball, a lot of baseball in various forms.

In addition to playing, as I was growing up, I also watched a lot of baseball. We'd watch the games from the Pacific Coast League on TV. I remember seeing games from the old Wrigley Field and Gilmore Stadium in Los Angeles. We rooted for the Los Angeles Angels and the Hollywood Stars. Some of the players we watched made the Major Leagues. I remember Steve Bilko, a huge home run hitter. And Dick Stuart. There were so many great players, Leon Wagner, Ed Bailey, Bill Mazerowski, Jim Brosnan, and Ryne Duren. Future managers Gene Mauch and George Bamberger also played in that league as I was growing up.

Like all the kids, I collected baseball cards, but we didn't save them. We did as all the kids did, we'd look at them, trade them, and put them into our tires to make our bicycles sound like motorcycles.

I was a fan of the Cincinnati Reds mostly. I loved their uniforms with the cut sleeves. They were the originals with sleeveless uniforms, which I thought was really cool. They had some big stars, big hitters, guys like Ted Kluszewski who was just so strong. I think they started with the cut sleeves to allow Kluszewski to show off his huge muscles. There were other great players as well—Wally Post, Gus Bell, Frank Robinson, Ed Bailey. I remember Johnny Temple and Roy McMillan as a great double play combination. Those Reds always seemed to be in the pennant race, but they never had quite enough pitching. Later, when I was a Yankees coach in the 1980s, those teams faced a similar problem. Those were teams with great hitters, terrific players, but just not quite enough pitching to

get them to the top of the standings.

I also rooted a bit for the Cleveland Indians. They also had the nice flashy uniforms. I rooted for the Indians over the New York Giants in the 1954 World Series. I remember coming home from school for lunch in 1954 and seeing Willie Mays make his famous catch on TV robbing Vic Wertz of a big hit. I saw the catch and then I had to go back to school. I was heart-broken when the Indians lost, because they were supposed to win that series easily. They had Bob Lemon and Early Wynn and Mike Garcia, all great pitchers, who, along with Bob Feller, were known as the Big Four. Ray Narleski too. They also had some great players like Larry Doby and Vic Wertz. That 1954 Indians team was the only non-Yankees team to make it to the World Series in the years from 1949 through 1958. In those days, the Yankees totally dominated baseball.

When I was in high school, to help get some spending money, I worked in a place that rented washing machines. There was a Post Office next door, and they had a dumpster out back where they'd throw away stuff that they couldn't mail. I'd sometimes look through the paper garbage and find old *SPORT* magazines with guys like Ted Williams and Stan "The Man" Musial on the covers and read the articles and dream of being a big leaguer myself.

But my path to the Major Leagues was in no way straight forward. On my first Little League team, they put me in right field. That's where you put the worst player. I didn't know how to catch the ball the right way. I didn't know how to hold my glove upwards to catch it. I'd try to catch everything in a basket, like Willie Mays. I had to learn a lot. On those teams, early on, when I was nine or ten, we didn't get uniforms, we just got a T-shirt and a cap. I was a long way away from Yankees pinstripes.

I practiced a lot, and slowly got better. We were able to play baseball year-round because of the warm weather. We formed our own league among the kids in the neighborhood. We couldn't afford a baseball so we would take an old sock and stuff it with other socks or rags or soft stuff and tie it up like a baseball. We'd pitch from 30 feet away and we could

make that ball do amazing things. We could throw curves and sliders and more. For us kids, this was a highly competitive way to play. We called this the “Sock Ball League.”

My backyard usually became the Polo Grounds or Crosley Field. We knew all the big league ballparks. Forbes Field. Ebbets Field. Each week we’d have our own “Game of the Week” sort of a take-off of the weekly baseball games shown on NBC-TV. Some of my best friends were the kids from the Neal family who lived behind us. They played a lot of baseball with me. We had all sorts of rules for what happened depending on where you hit the ball. If it hit in one spot, it was a single, another place was a home run. We also had to bat like the players on the team that was playing. If Stan Musial was batting, I’d have to hit left-handed. Duke Snider too. We imitated all the different players when we’d play. This was how I learned to switch-hit. I also hit a lot when I was alone. We had lots of stones in our driveway. I would hit them into our backyard pretending to be the various players. I’d be Pee Wee Reese, Jim Gilliam, Duke Snider, all the Dodgers, or whatever team I was emulating. Sometimes I would even get Roy White into those imaginary Dodgers lineups. When I’d bat, I’d always try to hit a home run. Pee Wee Reese hit singles with those stones. I hit homers.

As I grew up, there were a bunch of great players who I played with or against in those years, many who became Major Leaguers. This list includes Reggie Smith (who played for the Red Sox, Cardinals, and Dodgers), Don Wilson (who pitched for the Astros), Dave Nelson (Indians), and Lenny Randle (who played for the Rangers and the Mets). We all played on the sandlots, in Little League, and in Connie Mack ball, and in the American Legion leagues, as well as in high school.

One very good ballplayer from our neighborhood was Dave Kelly. He was a local star. There was no doubt that he was the best player in the neighborhood. Eventually, he got \$50,000 to sign with the Detroit Tigers. He reached Double-A. I played against him in the minor leagues. Making it all the way to the big leagues, though, is tough. As great as he was as a kid, he never made it.

As I played, I got better, of course, and was moved from the outfield and became an infielder. At Centennial High School, I moved to second base which allowed Dave Kelly to play shortstop. A few years later, Reggie Smith joined the team and played third base. We were one of the best programs in the state and were big rivals with Compton High.

By this time, seeing the players around me signing contracts, I knew that I would also play professionally. There was a lot of talent that surrounded me. Of note, these were in the years before there was an amateur baseball draft. Scouts would come to our games and our homes and offer us contracts. I was holding my own and was able to compete with the best of the ballplayers on the sandlots, the school teams, and on the semi-pro teams. I just knew the scouts would be coming to my home eventually as well.

One of the best players at our rival Compton High was Ronnie Woods. In my senior year, I hit .475. That was very good, but Ronnie batted .620! He was always getting hits, two or three a game. And when he batted, the way he stood, it looked like he'd hit every ball right at me at second base, even though he was a right-handed batter. He had quick, fast wrists, just like Hank Aaron, and he'd smash the ball down the third base line. Ronnie signed for \$25,000 with the Pirates. We eventually played together with the Yankees for a few years (from 1969 to 1971). Unfortunately, Ronnie got beamed in the minor leagues and was never the hitter he could have been. Things like that change a player. The same thing happened to Paul Blair of the Baltimore Orioles and who was later my teammate on the Yankees. Ronnie Woods had great talent and he could have been a huge star. I know this, there was no one better than him in Southern California when we played.

Some of the stars at the other schools at the time included Jim Rooker who pitched for the Pirates, Paul Schaal, who played for the Royals, and the Lefebvre brothers. Jim Lefebvre ended up playing for the Dodgers. I truly grew up in a hotbed of baseball.

But life was not always easy. The streets of Compton were not safe. The most dangerous part of Los Angeles at the time

was Watts which was just a couple of blocks away from where I lived. There were times when I came very close to getting badly hurt, or worse.

I remember when I was twelve- or thirteen-years old walking with my sister Sonja and her friend at night. We were walking my sister's friend home a few blocks into Watts. Out of the dark, four people jumped us. I got pulled down to the sidewalk, but I was able to get up and run. I was lucky. Sonja too. She also escaped. But my sister's friend was beaten up badly. She suffered broken ribs and a concussion and was in the hospital for a month.

Another time, a few years later, by this time I was in high school, I was with the Neal brothers and our friend Rudy Darlington. Rudy also played ball. He was a right-handed pitcher, and was pretty good, but he also had a bit of thug in him which prevented him from being as good as he could have been. One day, as we went past the Little League field, a car pulled up with four or five guys in it. They asked if we wanted to fight. We all just kept walking, but Rudy started to engage them. Soon we heard guys behind us with chains and tire irons. Again, we knew we better start running!

As I ran, I saw the Little League field and ran through the open fence in that direction. As I ran across the outfield, the grass was wet, and I slipped and fell. I figured I was about to get beaten. I laid in the grass in left field waiting... and nothing happened. They must not have seen me duck into the field, so no one followed. I then got up and ran like hell to get home. Years later, when I was in left field in Yankee Stadium, I thought of that moment—almost getting killed in left field at the Little League park when I was a high school kid. I had come a long way.

When I was sixteen years old, I worked in a liquor store doing stock work and making deliveries. I'd take the bottles and ride with them on my bike into all different parts of the city, even Watts. I'd deliver the bottles, get paid in cash, and then pedal back to the store. I was a sitting duck to get hit or to have someone steal the alcohol or money, or both, but somehow, in that job, no one bothered me.

I wasn't always a well-behaved kid. One summer, when we were in junior high, Rudy and I, and a few other kids, did some misbehaving. We broke into some school cafeterias and stole ice cream. In order to get into the schools, we would break some windows. We didn't have a lot of money, and the ice cream was a good treat. But that was Rudy, too. He was an instigator. Interestingly, we never got caught, or at least not initially.

A few years later, I was called out of a high school class to go to the principal's office where a police officer was waiting for me. He took me to the station, and they questioned me about what I had done those few years previous. I was part of the Great Ice Cream Robberies. By then I had gone straight, and I admitted it all. My friends had only admitted to breaking into a school or two. I confessed to all of them—maybe four schools in total. After my admission, the police locked me in a cell for a few hours and my mom had to come get me.

Then, in Juvenile Court, they reviewed my record. I was very frightened about being sent to Juvenile Detention. Rudy was sent there. It wasn't good. But, by then, I had good grades in school, all A's and B's in college prep classes too, so they gave me probation. That fortunate decision helped change my life.

Not everyone from the neighborhood found success. Rudy died years later from drugs.

By my senior year in high school, I was also playing football. My friend Arthur Tolliver told me to go out for the team. We played football in the streets, and he knew I was quick. I was only 150 pounds, and I didn't like the idea of being tackled by the big guys, but it was great fun.

On my first ever play in high school football, I took the ball on a kickoff and ran it back for a touchdown. I guess my speed really paid off.

On offense, I played as a back, running with the ball or blocking for the quarterback. The competition was tough, though. I played against Roy Jefferson who later was an All-Pro with the Pittsburgh Steelers. I also played against Jack Snow, another future NFL All-Pro. Think about that, I had to block

those guys! (Most of the time they ran right through me.) I was fortunate that we had Larry Todd as our quarterback. He could scramble. He later played for the Oakland Raiders. It's amazing how much athletic talent was in Compton and the surrounding areas at the time.

By the end of my senior year in high school, I had scholarship offers from UCLA to play baseball and from Long Beach State University to play football. But I knew if I received an offer to play professional baseball, then that's what I would do. I actually expected to get a big offer. Bob Bailey, who played at Long Beach at Woodrow Wilson High School, had recently signed for \$100,000 with the Pirates. The neighborhood boys were all hot commodities. I figured, since I played as well as them, that I'd be one too.

But life doesn't always go as we plan or wish. No offers came for me. Initially I was puzzled. I knew I had the talent. I had offers from UCLA and Long Beach State, so I knew if I wasn't going to play ball, I had options. I later learned that there were a few teams that might have been interested in me, including the Los Angeles Angels, but they thought I was going to college. In June, long after the other players in my neighborhood and against whom I played had signed contracts, a Yankees scout, Tuffy Hashem, eventually arrived at my door. He met with me personally, my mom didn't get involved in this discussion, and said that the Yankees would like to sign me. He said, "You're our type of ballplayer." This was the last thing I expected. The Yankees had been the furthest thing from my mind. And there was no indication that the Yankees were interested in me. We all knew who the scouts were and when they were watching us. When Tuffy stated that he'd been watching me for a while, I was very surprised. I'd never seen him before!

Hashem told me that the Yankees would offer me all of \$6,000. He also said he'd give me a few days to think it over. I didn't know what to do. \$6,000 was still a lot of money, but it wasn't anything like what the other guys had been signing for. To be honest, based on the bonuses the other guys were getting, this seemed very low to me. But, still, it was an offer. And

it came from the New York Yankees. Without a dad at home, I consulted with my high school coach David Carlyle and my American Legion coach, a man we called "Hot Rod." He said, "Roy, this is what you always wanted. This is your opportunity." And, of course, this was with the Yankees. The great New York Yankees who were always in the World Series. I agreed and took his advice.

I signed the contract soon after. I was paid \$1,000 on approval of the contract, and then would get \$2,000, the next year, on July 1, 1962, \$2,000 on July 1, 1963, and \$1,000 on July 1, 1964. I would also receive a bonus of \$4,000 on "assignment of contract to a major league club." That would be my goal. It was my goal, my dream, and my hope.

But first I had to prove I deserved it.

My trek into and through the minor leagues was about to begin..

Chapter 2

The Start of My Professional Baseball Journey 1962-1964

I WAS NOW A professional baseball player, so of course, I spent the summer playing American Legion and summer ball at home. Tuffy Hashem had said that I wasn't going to report to the minor leagues that year because I had signed so late. I signed the contract on July 1 which was half-way through the minor league season. Most of the other guys had signed months before. With the late start, Tuffy Hashem didn't feel that I'd get an even start, so I was a professional ballplayer playing unprofessionally at home for one more summer.

There were a number of future big leaguers who I played with that summer in various leagues and for various teams. Chet Brewer, a great former pitcher who played in the Negro Leagues ran a baseball program in Watts, California and he would gather up some of the best talent for the games. I played for Chet as did Willie Crawford, who later played for the Dodgers, Bobby Tolan, a future member of the Reds and Phillies, and Dock Ellis, who pitched for the Pirates and would one day be my teammate on the Yankees.

That summer I purchased a car with some of my money from the Yankees. The car, as I recall, was \$500 which ate up a lot of my initial cash, but I needed to get around to play baseball. My friend "Wally" Jones, also a ballplayer, got me a job that summer building the trailers for tractor trailer trucks. We'd spend hours each day using rivets to put the side panels on the trucks. It was hard and exhausting work. In southern California, in the summer, it was always hot. I needed the

money, so I did it, but I much preferred playing baseball to that type of manual labor.

I later found out that the Yankees, even though they signed me, didn't even know who I was. Tuffy Hashem had signed six guys (including me) that year without the Yankees' permission. I was the only one of the six players to eventually reach the big leagues. Hashem never even sent the Yankees a scouting report on me. He just signed me and the other guys. That's probably why my deal was for such little money. Not long after he signed us, he no longer worked for the Yankees. Amazing. I didn't learn about this until years later when Johnny Johnson, a Yankee farm director, told me that story. Later, Joe Trimble of the New York Daily News wrote this in a newspaper article, also after I had reached the Yankees. It is almost unbelievable. The guy who signed me did so without permission from the big club. I might have been the Yankees' "type of ballplayer," but the Yankees didn't even know who I was.

That fall, I enrolled at Compton Junior College. I was an art major. Art must run in my family. My sister would become a professional dancer. I would even end up as an art dealer after my playing days. And my dad would become a well-known artist himself. But that was all in the future; at that point he was just driving a cab in Los Angeles. We were all still starting to find our ways.

As the year turned to 1962, I remember waiting in anxious and eager anticipation for my letter from the Yankees to report to Spring Training. I figured the letter would come in January. It didn't. I look back today and am glad I didn't know that I was signed without permission from the Yankees. Had I known that at the time I might have figured they weren't going to invite me to Spring Training and that my career was over before it even began. But, in February, the letter, containing the reporting instructions, finally arrived. I was on my way. My trip into professional baseball would begin with a flight, the first time I would ever be in an airplane. I was to fly out of Los Angeles to Tampa, Florida.

After landing, the next part of the journey involved a bus ride to Haines City where the Yankees had their complex for

their players in the lowest levels of the minor leagues. The Class D, Class C, and Class B players all trained at Haines City. The Single-A, Double-A, and Triple-A teams trained in Bartow, Florida.

A whole series of new experiences awaited me in Florida, and not all of these were good. Segregation was real and very much alive in 1962. I had never before been judged or treated differently because of the color of my skin. That was about to change quickly.

For that first Spring Training, I stayed at the Haines City Hotel. There was a daily routine that we followed. We'd have breakfast at the hotel and then be shuttled in cars to the baseball complex. At the complex, we'd get our uniforms for the day. These were old hand-me-down Yankees uniforms. One day you might get Moose Skowron's pants, the next day you might be wearing Tony Kubek's. Needless to say, these uniforms didn't fit well, and we didn't look too sharp, but this was how it was done. We didn't get a chance to think about much. We did as we were told and just went out and played the game as best as we were able.

It was a great experience, playing ball as a new professional. I got to meet guys from all over the United States. These were great players, most of them white, like the guys at the hotel with me, but there were several other black players as well.

One day, at lunch, Leroy Reams, an 18-year-old rookie like myself, a black guy from Oakland, California said, "Roy, I see you here playing ball every day, but I never see you at night. Where are you staying?" I told him that I was at the Haines City Hotel. He replied, "You can't stay there." The Haines City Hotel was segregated and reserved for whites only. I guess because of my lighter skin complexion; they must have assumed I was a white guy.

The other black guys, I found out, stayed in people's homes or boarding houses in a different part of town. Yeah, segregation was alive and very real. Blacks weren't welcome at the Haines City Hotel, but they never knew, I guess, that I was black. I stayed there through spring training.

I enjoyed a very successful Spring Training. I worked hard and I performed well, and I became somewhat of a hot commodity among the minor league managers. The Yankees used a system that spring that allowed the various minor league managers to choose the players for their teams. I believe this was the only time the Yankees ever did that. The manager of the Greensboro Yankees, Vern Rapp, a man who would one day manage in the Major Leagues for the St. Louis Cardinals, took a liking to my playing and he chose me. This was a B-level team, pretty high up the minor league ladder and a tough place for a player to begin his professional career. I would be up against a host of guys who had been playing for a few years. A bunch of future Major Leaguers were in that league including Rusty Staub, Rico Petrocelli, Tommie Agee, Cesar Tovar, Ed Brinkman, and Tony Perez. Tony Perez was a future Hall of Famer, but of course, he was just a kid at the time. Also in that league were a number of future teammates of mine. Ron Woods was there. As was Gene Michael and John Kennedy. Some of my teammates on that Greensboro team who made it to the Yankees were Curt Blefary, Frank Fernandez, and Mel Stottlemyre.

The bus ride from Florida's Spring Training to Greensboro, North Carolina took about eleven hours. This time, once we arrived, I also was a target of segregation. As we pulled up to the hotel, Vern Rapp said, "Hey Roy, you and Jim (a teammate from Puerto Rico) wait here on the bus." Eventually a taxi came and took us to where we would stay in the other part of town. The black players stayed in private homes away from the rest of the team. I stayed with a great person, Hezekiah Day. He would talk to me about the Negro Leagues. He'd even come to our games and give me advice on how to improve my game. It would be two to three years before I'd ever stay in the same hotel again with my teammates.

But there I was, a member of the Greensboro Yankees. I felt I was ready to compete, but I did not get off to a great start. Vern Rapp wanted me to change my swing and hit down on the ball. This wasn't my natural style, but he knew I was fast, and he was trying to make me into a ballplayer in the

image of the great Maury Wills of the Dodgers. That may have been Wills' style, but it didn't work for me. Because of this, I struggled.

And Vern Rapp, I must say, was not the best manager for a first-year player, especially one far from home, just learning to be a pro, and facing a society the likes of which he had never seen before. Rapp didn't take losing well. And we had a bad team. (The 1962 Greensboro Yankees played to a 65-75 record and finished the season 24 games behind the first place Durham Bills. Only two teams in the league finished with worse records.) The only time we'd win was when Mel Stottlemyre pitched. He was way ahead of everyone else down there.

After a loss, Rapp would be screaming in his office and throwing things. Then he'd come into the locker room and curse us all out and say we'd have to play better and all that. Most of us were terrified of him because he had such a bad temper. If this was how all of professional baseball was managed, I certainly didn't like it. I began to think about my future in the game. But I went out, played second base, tried to do my thing, tried to follow my manager's orders, and I struggled throughout.

In that league, I really got to see what talented ballplayers looked like and played like. Tommie Agee was an opposing player who scared me to death when he was on the bases. He'd have no problem taking you out at second base. When he was running, he was like a freight train or like thunder—the ground actually shook. I could feel him running. He was that strong. Agee had been a top football player. I was quick around the bag though, and he never got me.

After a few weeks (about 25 games), I was hitting only .204 and I was sent down to Ft. Lauderdale. This was D-Ball, so I was actually sent down two levels, but, in a way, it was like a promotion. The ballpark in Ft. Lauderdale was used by the New York Yankees as their Spring Training facility. We played in a new stadium that had a good infield so there were no bad hops there unlike the Greensboro field. The lighting was also great. We could see the ball much better at night. Small things like this often make a huge difference.

At this time, I was still a second baseman. The tough thing for a ball player is that once you get sent down (or up), you take another player's spot. In the minors, often times, once you take a guy's position, that spells the end of a guy's career and his dreams. For Ft. Lauderdale, I took the spot of a player named Dolph Camilli. (Camilli had batted .188 in 15 games.) His dad had been a power hitter in the National League with the Brooklyn Dodgers for years and was the National League Most Valuable Player in 1941. It's sad when you see a guy get released, especially when it is because of you.

My roommate in Ft. Lauderdale was Tony Anglada. I shared an apartment with him and his wife. Tony was a knuckleball pitcher from the Dominican Republic who didn't speak any English. He was 21 years old, but he seemed a lot older to the rest of us, and he taught me a lot about being a professional ballplayer.

Unlike the Greensboro squad, the 1962 Fort Lauderdale Yankees were a good team. We were fighting for a pennant. My own start there, though, didn't begin all that well. I was hitting about .230 or .240 and I started having doubts if I was good enough. In my mind, I had already failed at Greensboro, Level-B, and now I was struggling at Level-D. I wondered about what kind of job I'd have if I wasn't a ballplayer. In a way, in a big way, baseball was all I knew. In retrospect, I think every ballplayer goes through this—there is a period of time when things don't go right or well, and the competition just seems too good. We look at ourselves and we feel we just don't measure up.

The results weren't there at the start for me at Fort Lauderdale. Even when I'd do the right thing at bat, the balls, even when I hit them hard, just didn't fall. Everything I hit seemed to be caught. The players would kid me as the unluckiest guy around. I'd hit two or three line drives a game and none of them would go for hits. It went on like this for weeks. I laughed along with the guys, but inside it was eating me up.

But then, eventually, and finally, the hits started coming. My average got up to .250, then .260, and eventually all the way up to .280. Pretty soon I was leading the team in batting.

In one game, everything went right. I went five-for-five using five different bats. I would end up batting .286 that year. The only regular with a higher batting average at season's end was another future Yankee, Mike Hegan, who batted .306.

The 1962 Florida State League was a nice league of players. There were a lot of good players there that year: Bert Campaneris, Fergie Jenkins (a future Hall of Famer), Alex Johnson, Lee May, Jimmy Wynn, and Tommie Agee. Future Hall of Fame manager Tony LaRussa was a player in the league back then!

One of my best memories from that season was a game we played against Daytona Beach, a farm club for the Kansas City A's. Bert Campaneris was on that team. In a game against us, he played all nine positions in the field, something he would do again in the Major Leagues years later. The amazing thing, even more amazing than playing all nine positions, was that when he pitched, he pitched both left-handed and right-handed. Since I was a switch-hitter, I didn't know what he'd do when I batted. Would we both keep switching? Well, I got up left-handed and he stayed right-handed. I then hit a triple off him. Many years later we met at a dinner, and he said, "Roy, I should have thrown lefty to you."

That year we often traveled on a Checker Aerobus with various players taking turns driving. The team had about three of these. Because I was often the driver, they let me keep one to drive myself and Tony Anglada to the ballpark and around the city.

Some of these rides to the away games were five to six hours away. To entertain ourselves on the long rides, we'd do word games, tell jokes, or play "name that tune." The travel was at times tedious, but it served a valuable purpose in that we really got to know each other as teammates. The rides brought us closer together. We made the best of it and, as I look back, I realize that we had a lot of fun on those drives. We also learned a lot about each other. We had players on the team who came from New York City who told me about what life was like in the city and on the East Coast. This kind of information helped me a great deal when I finally made it to

the big leagues.

Because of segregation, my non-white teammates and I couldn't stay with the team in the regular hotel and instead had to stay in the black section of town. The hotel where we stayed at home had a band, a loud band, that played every night. Our rooms were located just above where the band played. Needless to say, we didn't get much rest. So much of this life was new to all of us. We couldn't sleep, but we weren't sure how safe it was at night out on the streets. I, for one, never ventured out. After the games, I'd go right to my room.

Segregation also found its way to the ballpark. It was everywhere in the South back then. The stadium even had separate seating for the "colored fans." The black fans had to sit way down by the bullpen. I learned a lot about how different people view others.

That year we finished in first place with a 71-50 record. In spite of the challenges I faced professionally and societally, I learned a great deal. One of the most important lessons I learned was that I could play professional baseball and hold my own. The question I needed to answer was if I was good enough to get all the way to the big leagues.

In 1963, after a solid Spring Training, I returned to Level-B ball in Greensboro. That year, in Spring Training, there was no mistake about who I was. Along with Leroy Reams and the other black players, we stayed in the segregated part of town. There wasn't a nice hotel for us. Instead, we lived in a five-bedroom boarding house.

By now, I had grown more comfortable being away from home and found there was one benefit to living in the black section of the town—there was no curfew. There were no coaches who came to our section of the town to do bed checks or anything like that. We were on our own. During the season, we were focused on baseball and trying to get better so we could reach the big leagues. But I do recall in Spring Training, my teammates and I knowing we could do as we pleased, at least within reason. That often meant going to the

local schools to watch basketball games or finding a court and playing ourselves into the night. We had some players who could really handle the ball and shoot well. I had a good shot but wasn't that great at dribbling and some of the other aspects of the game. Still, it was fun, and it brought us together.

I had a better time that year. I knew my way around the league a bit and had refined my game. I also brought a new level of confidence with me and felt that I was able to play at that level. Vern Rapp was no longer the manager, so I was able, without any push-back, to return to my natural swing. Frank Verdi was the manager of that team, and he was good to play for. He had a much more low-key approach. He wasn't as temperamental as Rapp had been. Verdi had been an infielder and he taught me a lot. I hit over .300 that year (.309) and I made the All-Star team.

My roommate that year was Jim Horsford. He was a black player from Puerto Rico. Horsford had been around a while. He had been playing minor league ball since 1957. He taught me a lot about the racism I was facing by sharing what he and so many others had to go through. It wasn't easy. Ever. Jim was a pitcher (and sometimes an outfielder). He also shared that he once beamed and killed a batter in a game. Because of that he had a lot to deal with. I was learning that there was a lot more to baseball than just the game. Jim never made it to the Major Leagues. He got close, making it to Triple-A. He eventually played in the Mexican League. Ballplayers are shuttled throughout a team's system. The Yankees had seven minor league teams in 1963 and six in 1964. I didn't see him again after that season.

We had a good team again. We won our division (going 85-59). Curt Blefary, who would win the Rookie of the Year with the Orioles in 1965, was a star on that team. He hit 25 homers and batted .290.

There were a bunch of great players in that league also. Joe Morgan, a future Hall of Famer, was there. Other future big leaguers who stand out were Lee May, Walt Williams, and Cleon Jones. Gene Michael and Lou Piniella were two long-time future teammates who I competed against. Luis Tiant,

also just a kid, pitched in that league, but he was way ahead of us skill-wise. He should have been in the big leagues already.

By now, I was very comfortable as a professional baseball player, but that didn't mean that playing in the South at that time was pleasant. Oftentimes, mostly on the road, racist fans would yell at us on the field. I recall numerous times warming up in the on deck circle and hearing fans yelling "Hey LeRoy (not Roy, my name), if you get a hit, we're going to hang you after the game." It sure made me think. Another of the familiar racial epitaphs yelled at me when I was batting was the all-too-familiar refrain after my name was called by the public address announcer, "Now batting, Roy White." Certain fans would hear that and respond, "That ain't true."

Yes, racism was alive, and it is something I faced and had to live with on a daily basis. I was able to rise above it and perform. That doesn't mean it was easy. I found an inner strength and the taunts only made me stronger. I knew that the players who came before me, guys like Jackie Robinson and Larry Doby, and so many others, had it worse.

In 1964, I took another step closer to the big leagues as I reached Double-A with the Confederate Yankees who played in Columbus, Georgia. That team name today seems amazing. I can't imagine a team getting the name "Confederate Yankees" today. But, in 1964, I didn't think much of it. My job was to play ball.

Before that season started, I knew that I was a player the Yankees were watching. Before regular Spring Training opened, the Yankees had a special early camp in 1964. This was about a ten-day program designed for the top prospects to train with the big league Yankees. I was one of a handful of prospects, maybe fifteen in the whole system, to be invited to this early camp. Mel Stottlemyre and Mike Hegan, two future Major Leaguers, were also there with me.

I will never forget the first batting practice session that I watched. The early camp was, of course, at the Yankees' facility in Fort Lauderdale. At that park, there was a strong wind

that blew from right field out to left. On windy days, it was all but impossible to hit the ball through that wind to get it out. The first batter to step into the batter's box and hit was Yogi Berra. He was the manager, but he still loved to hit. Each batter would lay down two bunts and then get eight swings. Yogi drove line drives all over the park. The next batter was Roger Maris. He actually hit one through that tough wind and over the right field wall. Mickey Mantle followed and then hit three balls out. I then watched Joe Pepitone stepping up. Joe hit five balls through that wind and over the wall. Five. These were bullets hit right through the wind. Pepitone had the quickest hands and swing I had ever seen. His batting stance, hitting in a sort-of crouch, reminded me of Stan Musial. The talent that I observed was eye-opening. These were big leaguers.

In that camp, the Yankees issued me uniform number 78. I wore it proudly even though such a high number signified that I was a long way from making the big squad.

Out on the field, Yankee greats Bobby Richardson and Jerry Coleman provided personal instruction to me about how to properly play second base. I saw how Richardson used one of those old flat, pancake-like gloves to transfer the ball quickly to his throwing hand to make a double play.

During that camp, we all stayed at the Yankee Clipper Hotel which was right on the beach. I'm not sure why the segregation rules didn't apply then. Maybe it was because we were big leaguers (or top prospects working to get there).

Double-A was a big step forward, but I felt I was ready. My manager that year was Rube Walker who had been a catcher for the Brooklyn Dodgers and would later be a Major League pitching coach for about twenty years. In fact, Rube was the pitching coach for the 1969 Miracle Mets. He was another great manager for me. I found that we, as players, thrived when the manager would support us and if we needed directives, he would criticize us gently. I knew that Rube was on my side. This helped more than one might imagine.

There were a lot of players more experienced than me in this league, some real talent. Frank Fernandez, a catcher with whom I'd play with the Yankees, was there. Mike Hegan, our

first baseman, would also make it and have a fine career. These were two players I was climbing the minor league ladder with. At that time, I was still playing second base, my transition to the outfield was still in the future. Joe Faraci was my double play partner, our shortstop. We made a good combination.

Another infielder on the team was Ronnie Retton. He was a smaller guy, a Freddie Patek type player. He played hard. "Gutsy" would describe him. The 1964 season though was his last in pro ball. Years later, I met his daughter, the famous Olympic Gold Medal gymnast, Mary Lou Retton at a dinner. We were seated next to each other. She knew who I was and shared that I had played ball with her dad. It's amazing the small world connections I'd encounter over the course of my career. Years and years later, when I was a coach with the Yankees, a young shortstop named Bobby Meacham said, "You played ball for my dad." At first, I wondered what he was talking about, but then remembered Coach Meacham from when I was a kid playing junior high baseball.

I quickly acclimated to AA ball and was having a good season. I was hitting close to .300 and was on my way to the All-Star game in early July when everything suddenly changed. It happened on the ballfield. We were playing a game against the Macon Peaches, an affiliate of the Cincinnati Reds. It was a Sunday afternoon. I hit a slow chopper to third and hustled down the line to beat it out. The third baseman, I believe it was Len Boehmer, did not make an accurate throw and the ball came inside the first base line at the exact moment as I was running hard to the bag. The first baseman, Lee May, was also arriving at that exact moment. Lee May was a big strong man who would go on to have a long and successful career with the Cincinnati Reds and the Baltimore Orioles. His elbow hit me square on the left side of my face. I went down immediately, knocked out, unconscious.

The next thing I knew I was on the ground being put on a stretcher and brought to the clubhouse. The doctor looked at me and said it was just a bad bruise, that I'd have a black eye, but I'd be okay. Subsequent happenings proved that that doctor was very wrong.

After the game, back at my apartment, the pain was bad. Excruciating. My face was throbbing. I had to take seven or eight Tylenol just to get to sleep. The next morning, I woke up with my face really swollen. I looked like Frankenstein. We had a road trip to Knoxville starting at about 8:00 a.m. I told Rube Walker, "I think it's more than just a black eye." He said that he'd get me checked out at the hospital when we reached Knoxville. That 10-hour bus ride was interminable. I felt every bump in my face. It was excruciating. And worse.

Once at Knoxville, I first tried to suit up for the game, but I knew I couldn't play. I couldn't run. Everything hurt too much. I was soon at the hospital getting an X-Ray. The doctor who checked me out stated that the rim of my eye socket in my left eye had a fracture and that I needed an operation. He noted that I could get double vision if it wasn't repaired. Double vision would, of course, have spelled the end of my baseball career. The doctor stated that he could do the surgery, a painful procedure that would have had him drill a hole just above my gum line to drain my sinus of blood and then stuff it with cotton, the next day.

I went back to the team and told Rube Walker what the doctor suggested. Rube told me that he'd call the Yankees to see what they wanted me to do. Since I was able to fly, they had me come to New York City to be evaluated at Lenox Hill Hospital. Fortunately I was a legitimate prospect and doing well because the Yankees were making sure that I was going to get the very best care.

This was my first ever trip to New York. I reported to Yankee Stadium and went into the clubhouse. I remember Tommy Tresh coming over to welcome me. Then the other guys too. I looked pretty bad with a swollen and bruised face. They all asked what had happened. I stayed for the game, one in which the Yankees won in the late innings against the Baltimore Orioles who were in first place. Tom Tresh hit an RBI single off Stu Miller to score Mickey Mantle in the bottom of the eighth inning to give the Yankees the lead.

Later, at Lenox Hill Hospital, they determined that I did not need an operation. I was admitted and they fixed the swelling

and the drainage issue without surgery. Three days later I was out of the hospital and back on my way to the minor leagues. But, for that year, at least, I wasn't the same player.

A big part of the problem was that it was a few weeks before I could even eat solid food. This impacted my energy and fitness. I was somewhat miserable. As a result, I struggled at the plate and my batting average dropped. What had been such a promising season ended disappointingly. My final batting average that season was only .253.

At one point that year, a promotion to Triple-A seemed a very real possibility, but following the injury, because of my slump, I never got that promotion.

In 1965, I returned to Columbus for what would be my last full minor league season. This time everything worked out great. There is a lesson here in believing in oneself and the value of perseverance. I knew I was a better player than the one that slumped to a finish in 1964. I worked hard and was determined to be better the next year. Plus, I was healthy. In baseball, the law of averages also seems to play a role. In my first minor league season, everything I hit seemed to get caught. In 1965, everything I hit seemed to fall in. I was hitting everything they threw up there. I stayed consistent throughout the whole year.

I remember a series we played in Chattanooga that year against the Lookouts. In that series, I must have had 12 hits in 18 at bats including two or three home runs. They just couldn't get me out. Not long after that, we were back in Columbus playing a home series again against the Lookouts. I continued my hot hitting. This prompted their manager, the former Phillie catcher Andy Seminick, to yell out to his pitcher as I came up to bat, "Tell him what's coming. It can't be any worse." The pitcher said "Fastball." I didn't know what to expect and he threw a fastball right by me. It seemed he was telling the truth so when he next yelled "Curveball," I was ready. I hit that one off the right centerfield wall for a triple. After that they went back to not telling me what pitches were coming.

We had a great team that year. A host of future Yankees played on the 1965 Confederate Yankees. Frank Fernandez was there, as was Mike Hegan. But we also had Steve Whitaker, Mike Ferraro, and a few others. Our pitching staff had two solid starters who each had Major league success, Fritz Peterson and Stan Bahnsen. Peterson would win 20 games in 1970 and was an All-Star. Bahnsen would be the 1968 American League Rookie of the Year.

We had a great manager that year, Loren Babe. Hall of Fame manager Tony LaRussa would later give Loren Babe credit for teaching him how to manage. He was a manager who simply understood the game and the players. Like the good managers I'd encounter before and after, we knew he cared about us. He believed in us, and we worked hard to reward his confidence with our best play. Loren Babe would later coach at the big league level with the Yankees and the White Sox.

In my minor league days, there was a roving hitting coach for the Yankees named Wally Moses. He helped my career significantly. Because I was often hitting well, he didn't work with me often. He was always with the other guys, the players who might have been struggling. Then, one day, he came up to me and said, "Roy, just because I haven't talked to you, that doesn't mean I haven't been watching you. The main thing is you have one problem—sometimes you wait too long and then try to be quick all at once. This brings you out of your crouch too fast and you don't get a quality swing." He advised me to, "get started early." In other words, to be better prepared to hit before the ball was out of the pitcher's hand. This was great advice that I used my entire career. It's also advice that I shared with others when I was a coach myself. It helped numerous players including a bunch of stars—guys like Don Mattingly and even Derek Jeter. The way I helped Jeter was indirect and it's a story I'll get to later.

That year, our team finished in a tie for first place with the Asheville Tourists. It was a strong league with dozens of future Major Leaguers playing against us on a daily basis. Pat Dobson, John Hiller, and Mike Marshall, all who had a good

deal of big league success all pitched against us.

That year I hit .300 along with 19 homers. I also scored 103 runs—all while batting lead-off. I was named the Most Valuable Player of the Southern League. It was a great season all around.

After the 1965 minor league season ended, Loren Babe called me to his office and said, “Forget your ticket home to Los Angeles. You got a call to play for the Yankees.”

My Major League career was about to begin!