

I looked at his entry in my Macmillan Baseball Encyclopedia so many times it automatically opens to page 1006. His entry says he was 5'-11" and 180. Says his name was Frank Krischeck and his nickname was "Bulldog." Says he batted left and threw left, was born in 1937 in Kanock, PA and played eight seasons in the majors with four different teams from 1961 to 1968. What Macmillan doesn't say is Frank Krischeck is my dad, something that neither of us knew for almost 17 years.

In 1955 Dad was drafted by Cleveland out of Kanock high school where he'd been an all-state running back as well as a pitcher with an assortment of pitches, including one of his own invention, the knuckle drop. With stops at Selma, Alabama and Minot, North Dakota it took him until '60 to work his way up to AAA Salt Lake, where the air must have been too salty or too dry because the knuckle drop didn't and Dad got hammered all over the yard. When he got passed over in the Indians September call-up, it looked like the end. Expansion saved him. The expansion LA Angels chose him in the special player draft in December of '60.

The Angels kept my dad down at AAA to start the '61 season, if you can call Hawaii a downer. That September it finally happened, my dad, Frank Krischeck, became a major league ballplayer getting a sip of coffee in the September call-up. He got in one game. He pitched to seven batters and didn't get any of them out. Four of them scored and that left Dad with an ERA of infinity for '61. It's right there in Macmillan, that squiggly symbol in the ERA column.

Anyway, he spent '62 in Hawaii except when he went up to LA again in September. He got some big league outs but was 0-2 with an 8.14 in 11 games.

Dad was 27 in '63, but even after a good spring training when he struck out the side once and another time got Maris to hit into a 4-6-3, the Angels sent him back to Hawaii. Figuring pitching ball in paradise and rooming with Bo Belinsky was better than working, Dad wouldn't give it up.

As he stepped off the plane in Hawaii in April '63 he met a hula girl named Lana who put a lei around his neck . He put a lay on her, too, I suppose, because by mid-July, after a couple of Angels went down with arm problems, my father went back to California without knowing my mom was pregnant. This time he stuck and he never came back.

In 1964 for the Angels Dad mopped up a 14-2 loss to the Yankees in Yankee Stadium and gave up Mantle's 410th home run. I got the chills when I learned that. My Dad on the mound in the House that Ruth built. Damn!

He finished the year in LA 3-9 with a 4.60 in 22 appearances. He was able to get that knuckle drop thing over enough to average a strikeout an inning, but he walked as many as he whiffed and was in the top 10 in wild pitches and hit batsmen.

That was good enough to get him traded to Kansas City where he spent '64, '65, and '66. He got married in KC and quickly divorced after his wife followed him and found him drunk and in bed with a 20-year-old Annie. Dad's last year in K.C was his best. He pitched 136 innings in 52 games, with 98 walks and 101 strikeouts. He was 6-7 with a 3.98 and 10 saves.

Being a lefty that'd make him rich today, but then it got him released. Over the winter he signed with the Phillies where he played one last year. He didn't do much, but he did beat Gibson. He came in with no outs in the second after Rick Wise pulled a

hammy. He shut out the Cards the rest of the way. Somehow the Phillies got two off Gibson and won 2-0.

The Phillies released him that summer. He was two months shy of his 31rd birthday. There were no takers. He was done. He stayed in Philly selling beer for a big Bud distributor until the lease was up on his apartment in November. That's when he moved in with his mother at the old homestead on Hill Street in Kanock.

He walked into her kitchen, grabbed a beer and sat down at the kitchen table. She looked at him and said, "Now what?"

His old high school teammate Bill Bohn owned a Bud distributorship and gave Dad a cushy job selling a product that sold itself in an area with more liquor licenses per capita than Vegas. Bohn figured all Dad had to do was walk in an establishment and the proprietors would throw money at him all agog at their one and only bona fide homegrown major leaguer.

But Dad wouldn't play the role. He wouldn't introduce himself as a former ball player, wouldn't answer to "Bulldog", and wouldn't talk about his career. It was as though he was embarrassed by it and, in fact, he was. I learned this about my Dad long after the fact from my Uncle Russ, my Dad's brother.

But before I tell you about that, you ought to know a little about me. My mom was only 19 and didn't even know she was pregnant with me until after Dad left Hawaii for LA in July of '63. I was born the following February. She named me Shane and gave me her last name, Lanai. She didn't trust ballplayers, with good reason, so she never tried to contact my father, figuring he wouldn't make much of a dad.

Mom and I lived on welfare and waitressing in a government project in Honolulu. When I was 12 Mom told me the truth about Dad.

I immediately became obsessed. I told my Little League teammates about it and, “yea, right”, they said, and rolled their eyes and laughed. I saved up \$19.95 delivering papers and bought a first edition Macmillan and wore it out looking at my Dad’s entry and studying every team he played on. A sportswriter at the Honolulu Advertiser who knew him told me stories about the partying and laughed like crazy. The writer arranged access to the Advertiser’s morgue and I photocopied box scores and game stories of his appearances with the Islanders, but I couldn’t find a picture. I looked for baseball cards, but nobody in Hawaii, at least that I could find, saved nine-year old baseball cards of obscure pitchers.

Through a pen pal program at my school I exchanged letters with a kid my age in California by the name of Rex. He found two Frank Krischeck baseball cards and sent them to me. When I looked at his rookie card I thought I was looking in a mirror. I showed them to my teammates and they said, “holy crap.”

My mother died of breast cancer last year, 1981. She was 36. I was 18. After the funeral one of my uncles gave me \$650. My share, he said, of grandma’s house. He offered to take me in, but that spring, as soon as I graduated from high school, I ran off on my own to look for Frank Krischeck.

I flew to California to meet Rex. His parents were nice and let me sleep on a futon in a room over the garage, “temporarily”, they said. Rex got me on his baseball team. The kids bought my story and were duly impressed.

I wrote letters to Major League Baseball, the Angels, and the Phillies asking for the last known address of Frank Krischeck. Not one wrote back. Telephone information in Pennsylvania had two Krischecks. Neither of them had ever heard of Frank, the former ballplayer.

Rex's parents were flea marketers and on Sunday mornings they took Rex and me along on their excursions. Rex and I browsed books and baseball cards. One day I stumbled on a thin paperback and couldn't believe my eyes when I looked at the cover of "Addresses of Former Major League Baseball Players." I'd never known such a book existed, but there it was in my hands for 10 cents. And there on page 32 was Frank Krischeck, 111 Hill Street, Kanock, PA. The book was seven years old. Was he still there? I aimed to find out. Rex wanted me to call my Dad before I just walked in on him and introduced myself as the son he never knew he had, but we couldn't get a number. It was just as well, I didn't want to call, didn't want to give him a chance to deny or reject me from 3,000 miles away.

That night I stuffed a change of underwear, a couple pairs of jeans and two T-shirts in my backpack around my Macmillan. The next morning I set \$50 on the futon, which left me \$192 from the \$650 my uncle had given me, walked to the Greyhound station and bought a ticket for Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, which, the ticket agent said, was as close as he could get me to Kanock. It was a three-day ride to Pennsylvania on Greyhound buses and along the way I studied an atlas and Pennsylvania guide book I had bought at a flea market.

Kanock was up in the mountains and looked to be 100 miles from anywhere. Half the county was a National Forest and the other half was game lands. There were tons

of streams and lakes. Sounded like a place that might have more deer than people. It didn't sound like a place a ballplayer would come from, but there you go.

In Harrisburg I found a local bus company that went to Kanock. I got there mid-afternoon, found Hill Street, found number 111. It looked like an old farmhouse. With rookie butterflies, I knocked on the door. A woman with gray hair and blue eyes like mine answered. She asked me what did I want and I took a shot and said, "hello grandma."

"Ohmigod," she said as she peered at my face. "You're the spittin' image of..." She didn't finish her sentence, but I got the meaning. Turned out Dad was gone overnight on a sales trip to Erie, so she called my uncle Russ who came right over. A letter written by my mom explained everything.

My uncle sat me down and filled in the blanks in Dad's story. We talked for hours. When I went on and on about how excited and proud I was to have a Major League Dad, Uncle Russ gave me a warning. He said Dad was embarrassed about his baseball career and his lifestyle back then. Said Dad carried on as if it never happened and he likely wouldn't talk about it.

I didn't get it. What was there to be embarrassed about?

"To him, today, almost everything," Russ said. "He was the best and proudest athlete ever to come out of Kanock. So, what do they talk about? He gave up Mantle's 410th home run, a 500-foot job. Once hit three batters in a row to force in a run and lose a game. Never reached the post season. Finished with a losing record for a bunch of lousy teams. And there's that infinity thing. He's embarrassed, too, about the heavy drinking, the partying and the fooling around."

Russ explained that Dad was a little bitter about the money, too. His highest Major League salary was \$17,500. Total for the nine seasons was \$60,000. He'd only been out of the game six years when his old Phillies teammate Dick Allen signed a quarter million dollar contract with the White Sox.

After Russ left, my new grandma sent me to the shower and told me I could wait up for Dad on the couch. But after I fell asleep in front of a Phillies' game, she sent me to bed in a spare bedroom which used to be Uncle Russ's. After three days and nights on buses, I slept soundly, until a hand on my knee shook me awake. A man sitting at the foot of the bed said. "Shane. Son. Wake up," he said.

"Son". How many years I had yearned to hear that word? How many times I had imagined this moment? But I was confused. The man at the foot of the bed was old and gray-haired. My father, the Frank Krischeck I knew from baseball cards, was barely older than I was. Time had stopped for me when it came to my father. Stopped in 1961 with him 25 years old and on the mound in the major leagues. Stopped with him smiling back at me from a baseball card.

I hid my surprise. He motioned me to sit up and held out his arms. We hugged and he whispered, "Sorry, son, sorry."

"It's okay," was all I could think to say and we both wept.

We sat at the kitchen table talking until 10 o'clock in the morning. Well, I did all of the talking. I must have told Dad my whole life story. He cried again when I told him about Mom's death and he laughed and tousled my hair when I told him how I had searched out his box scores and imagined him striding around the mound at Yankee Stadium and how it gave me goose bumps to have a Major League Dad.

After a little breakfast he took me on his route with him. The first stop was Shakey's, one of the many bars in and around Kanock where sports fans hung out. It was a bright morning outside, but inside it may as well have been midnight. The small portal windows were curtained. It took a minute for my eyes to adjust to the dark and see six guys sitting at the bar under a haze of blue smoke. I stayed back by the door. Before Shakey could say a thing my Dad blurted out, "If you still want me to sign that old uniform for the back bar, it's okay."

Shakey raised an eyebrow and went in the back to get the uniform. One of the guys at the bar blew a smoke ring and asked, "Does that mean you're finally going to tell us if that infinity thing stood for the number of Annies you met?" They all hooted and laughed.

"Yea," said another one of the guys, "and what about the homer you gave up to Mantle, I heard it's still going?" More laughter.

"Let me tell you about that," Dad said. He leaned in close to the bar and the guys gathered around. "I never told anybody this before," he said barely above a whisper. "I grooved him one because he promised he'd take me to the Copacabana that night."

They all screamed with laughter, jumping from their stools or burying their heads in their folded arms on the bar.

"Hey Shakey," one of them yelled, "pour old Bulldog here a shot and a beer."