

O! The Places in Baltimore You'll Go

By Lily Prince

WELCOME
 DISCOVER THE
 FEELING OF
 BALTIMORE
 PRIDE IN THE
 CITY. YOU
 CAN FIND
 THIS FEELING
 AT CAMDEN
 YARDS, THE
 BALTIMORE
 ORIOLES
 BASEBALL
 STADIUM.
 SHOW YOUR
 SPIRIT, AND
 COME OUT TO
 WATCH A
 BALL GAME.

I adjusted my borrowed baseball cap as the train came to a halt. Linked arm and arm with a friend, I felt a tug and turned in time to slip out of the sliding metal doors. I was swept up by the sea of orange and black spilling out of the light-rail and fell into the arms of my new love, Camden Yards. She embraced me with warm air of early September, carrying the scent of sweet and smoky food. Light radiated above her crown, pouring into the growing dark sky. Her voice had a crackle and a rasp as she echoed the chants of her guests and the resonating ping from a swinging bat. She pulled me in closer, her iron smile widening as the park gates opened for the evening. She was alive, breathing, beating, and eager to showcase her pride and joy: the Baltimore Orioles baseball team.

You don't have to love baseball to love the O's. Had someone asked me a few months ago to go see America's so-called favorite pastime, I would have shrugged. Yet, nothing can replace something as essential to experiencing Baltimore than a trip to Camden Yards on a student discount Friday night. For seven dollars and twenty-seven cents you can find yourself in one of the 45,971 seats of the grand stands. Sure, your chances at catching a home run are greater when breathing down third base, but while in the "Left Field Upper Reserve" you gain the prospect of being in excellent and entertaining company. A ticket under ten bucks was enough to convince myself, as well as plenty other far from avid fans, to go out to the ballgame.

Camden Yards did not earn the title of standing as "one of the crown jewels

of modern stadiums" for being ordinary (Speake). The new nest to the Orioles debuted in spring of 1992 with the determination not to be another "multipurpose stadium devoid of character" ("Camden Yards History"). Rather than being stranded in the outskirts of the city where land is sold by the penny, you will find yourself plotted in the bustling heart of the Inner Harbor. Speckled with quaint details, "the first retro ballpark" masterfully incorporates features reminiscent of the beginnings of baseball (Cardinale). The brick laying composing the building and sidewalks of the area engulf you while walking into the stadium. Iron fences are not seen as boundaries, but are the gates to the heaven of having a classic baseball experience.

Nearing the entrance, you will find the the O's version of the Hollywood Walk of Fame, the "Eutaw Street Home Runs" (Jones). These 53 plaques represent the spots where each out-of-the-park ball once landed, keeping at-tendees' eyes wandering and relishing in the history around them. Upon entering the stadium, you will find yourself in awe of the old-fashioned neon sign bearing "The Sun" in bright yellow letters. Its brightness parallels the glow of orange filling the stadium to its brim as next to no one would dare come clad in anything other than bright clemson. As you make your way to the nosebleeds—that your college budget can breathe because of—you ought to take in the details around you. You cannot forget to glance at the aisle seats iron embellished with the "100-year old



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logo used by the Baltimore Orioles of the 1890's" ("Camden Yards History"). It reminds many fans of the franchise's proudest glory days, the embellishments also boasting a replica of champion Pennant title held from 1894 to 1896 (Sheehan).

Although the Orioles have not revisited these glory days in a while, the spirit of their fans remains loyal and loud. This is especially evident during the national anthem. Paying respects to our nation starts off as usual, until the crowd reaches the second to last verse. The crowd cheers in exaltation, "O! say does that star spangled banner," priding themselves in the mention of their home team. This tradition began over 35 years ago by a superfan named "Wild Bill Hagy" (Steinberg). What originally drew stares and looks of disgust, quickly became the ritual chant of Charm City. The loud "O!" has also been heard around the world, including the 2016 Rio Olympics. As Michael Phelps received his twentieth gold medal, a clear "O!" during the playing of the anthem evoked a laugh

from the Baltimore native swimmer (Steinberg). Camden Yards always erupts after this tradition, the team and the spectators equally then ready to play ball. Wild Bill's enthusiasm for the sport is prevalent among many of the attendees. Earning the label of a super fan is no easy feat. Out of the 2.5 million fans that step into the stadium each season, only 81 are given the prestigious title "Fan of the Game" (Meyer). By other major league team's standards, all O's fans qualify as super fans, which means the die hard fans must go above and beyond all expectations in order to gain a coveted time slot appearance on *the* "fan cam."

There is a reason why the fan cam seems to always gravitate to the highest rows of the stadium. You will not find the fervor and enthusiasm for the sport in the luxury boxes or the prized spots behind home plate. You will not find the generosity or next-of-kin kindness in the \$500 foul-line seats. However, you will find the irreplaceable sense of being connect-

ed to something much greater than yourself with a place in those risers. Those that sit up in the grand stands do not care about impressing Instagram followers with the view or if they are even sitting in the right seat for that matter. They care about the experience, the sound, the sense of being enveloped by the crowd and the escape from the outside world. When you visit Camden Yards, you truly get a bird's eye view of Baltimore. It's a sampling of the people, food, history, and the liveliness of the city. Sitting alongside over forty-thousand of your newest friends changes you, initiating and welcoming you into the next chapter of your life. It's baseball that completes Baltimore and it's Baltimore that will complete you.

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