



Savannah Bananas

Bless the Lord who crowns you with tender mercies (Psalm 103, NKJV).

I'm only seventy-seven. A lot of good years ahead of me. Do I want to continue on in the same direction or perhaps veer off into something new? Indeed, every now and then I contemplate how I might re-invent myself.

I recently talked with a woman approaching seventy who has taken up billiards and plans to join a women's league. She wants to shake up her daily routine. As for me, my best-selling novel exists only in my head, but it sure would be nice to get it published before I reach 80.

More realistic, however, might be overseeing my own five-acre goat farm—also a life-long dream. The biggest roadblock in this instance is husband John. With no deadline, I feel like a teenager with plenty of time to figure out what I want to be. But should I expect the Lord's tender mercies on my dreams of fame or on mere self-gratification?

Today I was inspired by an article in the sports section of our local paper about a minor-league baseball team that left town because the city fathers refused to build a new stadium. For diehard fans in Georgia, the exodus was a sad day—no more cheering on a hometown team. The old weather-beaten stadium, where both Hank Aaron and Babe Ruth had stepped up to the plate, was built in 1926. It is small by today's standards, seating only 4,000 fans, and even those seats had been hard to sell. No longer.

New owner Jesse Cole was determined to reinvent the game and make hometown baseball fun again. It took a few years, but now all the seats in the old stadium are sold out, with tens of thousands on the waiting list and some three million TikTok followers. Indeed, the Savannah Bananas are an entertainment sensation far beyond Savannah, while spreading laughter and good will at home. It's an ideal antidote for hard times churned up every night on national

broadcasts: inflation, fires, floods, election fraud, Covid, racial unrest, war crimes, mass shootings, government gridlock.

Before and during the games, players show off their dance routines and acrobatic skills. Bananas Nanas (women over sixty-five) entertain the fans as cheerleaders, and every game offers new home-grown entertainment. Toddlers in diapers, with parents at hand, are called out to the field.

Team members demonstrate how to do push-ups and encourage them to follow suit. There are howls of laughter from the crowd as some give it their best shot and others wander off like a herd of cats. Soon to follow in the middle of an inning while the opposing pitcher readies himself, the batter drives to the plate in a kid's electric car. Or when an umpire

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calls four balls, the batter may dance, do cartwheels or moonwalk to first base. All part of the good family fun captured on local television.

"Some people think we only recruit guys who do dances," says manager Tyler Gillum. "That's part of it, but you've got to be able to play." Amid all the silliness and crazy antics, however, the coaches and players are serious about winning. After all, it's baseball, not a clown parade. Indeed, the Bananas won the league title in 2021 with a record of 40-10. In late spring of 2022, they were 21-8.

A feel-good headline: *Baseball team reinvents itself, inspires millions.* A less publicized factor is that the team has helped to generate signs of healing in a fractured city due to decades of animosity, inequity and prejudice. A spot-on headline: *Lord crowns hometown frivolity with tender mercies.* □

—Ruth Tucker