

# THE KID

*Dear Williams  
The Kid*

THE IMMORTAL LIFE  
OF  
TED WILLIAMS

BEN BRADLEE, JR.

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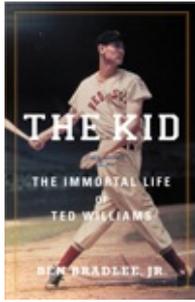
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OF  
TED WILLIAMS

**BEN BRADLEE, JR.**



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*For Jan, Joe, Anna, and Greta.  
And in memory of Matt Herrick.*

## Author's Note

When I was a boy growing up in the mid-1950s outside Boston, Ted Williams was my hero. My bedroom was plastered with pictures of the Kid clipped from *Sports Illustrated* or *Sport* magazines, and I especially liked a large, framed, pen-and-ink drawing done by the artist Robert Riger in 1955 showing Williams in baseball repose, leaning on two bats, presumably waiting his turn to hit.

Like thousands of kids my age, I was captivated by Ted's peerless batting skill and by the way he always seized and held the spotlight. He was the only reason to follow the abysmal Red Sox teams of that era. When I went to games, I was struck by the way the atmosphere at Fenway Park changed each time he came to bat. There would be an anticipatory murmur from the crowd when Ted stepped into the box. He'd knock some real or imagined dirt from his spikes, dig in, wiggle his hips, grind his hands on the handle of the bat, and hold it tight against his body, ready to face the pitcher. People never even considered leaving their seats when Williams was hitting. His at bats were events, and he himself was the main event in Boston sports from 1939 to 1960 and well into his retirement.

With his dramatic, tempestuous persona, Ted made as much news off the field as on: always feuding with newspapermen, outraged over perceived slights, spitting or gesturing at hostile fans, going off not just to one war but to two as a Marine Corps fighter pilot, getting married and divorced three times. He even made news fishing, once catching a 1,235-pound black marlin off the coast of Peru and putting on annual fly-casting exhibitions in the off-season.

I got Ted's autograph once, waiting outside the players' parking lot at Fenway Park with scores of other kids. Williams stopped to sign that day, which he didn't always do. He insisted on imposing some order on the unruly scene before him, and he made us take turns. I still have the ball he signed for me, on the sweet spot, of course, the ink on the signature now fading badly with the passage of more than fifty years.

And I happened to be at the ballpark on Sunday, September 21, 1958, when Ted, enraged by a rare strikeout, flung his bat in disgust, only to have it sail into the box seats near the Red Sox dugout and strike an elderly woman in the head. Mortified, Williams rushed to the first-aid room to apologize to the bloodied lady, explaining that he had lost control of the bat because the handle had sticky resin on it. The woman, a Ted fan, saw how anguished he was and consoled *him*, saying she knew it had been an accident.

Melodrama of that sort always seemed to attend Williams. He knew how to make an entrance—and an exit, as when he took his leave from baseball by hitting a majestic home run on his last time at bat on September 28, 1960.

I kept following Ted in his retirement, with interest. He took a visible job with

Sears, Roebuck, advising the chain on a line of sports and outdoor equipment. He had a syndicated column. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame the first time he was eligible, in 1966. He published his autobiography in 1969, which I remember devouring. He made a surprise return to baseball as manager of the lowly Washington Senators that same year. He wasn't particularly good at managing, but the game was better for having him back. He stayed engaged in baseball as a fan, and signed on with the Red Sox as a hitting coach. In that capacity, Williams would make godlike annual appearances at spring training, where he would hold court before worshipful young players—and the writers, whom he had outlasted and bent to his will.

Being Ted Williams seemed like a full-time job. He plied the memorabilia circuit, but not aggressively. He returned to Fenway Park for Old-Timers' Games and to be honored on various occasions. He had highways and tunnels named after him. And in 1991, on the fiftieth anniversary of his signature achievement—batting .406—President George H. W. Bush feted him at the White House along with Joe DiMaggio, whose fifty-six-game hitting streak in 1941 was also recalled with awe. Then Ted returned solo later in the year to receive the Medal of Freedom from Bush. Those celebrations, however poignant, paled in comparison to the nationally televised spectacle of Williams, eighty and frail, returning to Fenway Park for the 1999 All-Star Game and what everyone understood would be his farewell to Boston. Living members of baseball's All-Century Team joined that year's All-Stars in one of the game's most memorable tableaux, swarming around Williams in adulation and refusing to leave the field despite appeals to do so by the public-address announcer.

So it seemed Ted never really left the sporting scene. When he died in 2002, I read the obituaries, the special sections, and the tributes and was struck by how much interest there still was in his life, by how many different people he had touched in different ways, and by what a rich, extraordinary life he had led. I was familiar with the Williams genre—the dozen or so previous books on the Kid, the vast majority of which had been written by adoring sportswriters who had concentrated almost exclusively on his baseball exploits. I'd read most of them as a boy when they came out—short books like *Ted Williams: The Eternal Kid*, by Ed Linn (1961), *Ted Williams*, by Ray Robinson (1962), and *The Ted Williams Story* by Gene Schoor (also 1962). Williams himself improved on the spare, early books with his autobiography, *My Turn at Bat*, ghostwritten by John Underwood. *My Turn* captured Ted's voice, but was limited in scope, as autobiographies often are, and Williams barely delved into his personal life at all. He also had thirty-three more years to live after the book was published.

In subsequent years, several coffee-table books about Ted appeared, most of them glowing hagiography. In 1991, Columbia University English professor Michael Seidel produced the solid and serious *Ted Williams: A Baseball Life*, though it received little national attention. In 1993, Ed Linn greatly expanded his small 1961 book into the worthy *Hitter: The Life and Turmoils of Ted Williams*. The best piece of writing on Ted in this period, however, was not a book but a long piece in *Esquire* magazine by the estimable Richard Ben Cramer, published in 1986. Cramer, who died of cancer in 2013, precisely captured Ted's vernacular—and a hint of his deep-seated anger: the Kid spoke in loud and profane staccato bursts, veering from one subject to another. It was an ultimately sympathetic portrait of a troubled man who tried to be the best at

what he did, a man who wanted fame but not celebrity and who was the absolute master of his own his-way-or-the-highway universe.

This was basically the state of “Ted lit”—plentiful but thin—when I began work on this biography more than a decade ago now, in the fall of 2002. Before long, Leigh Montville’s *Ted Williams: An American Hero* appeared. Montville, a former sports columnist at the *Boston Globe* and a colleague of mine when he was there, is a gifted writer—and much faster than I am. His book, published in 2004, just twenty-one months after Williams’s death, raised the bar in Ted lit substantially.

I decided not to skimp on the central baseball part of Ted’s life but nevertheless to concentrate my efforts on areas that had been far less chronicled, such as his troubled childhood, his anger and its source, his kindness to sick children and others down on their luck, his war service, his dealings with the sportswriters who covered him (a dynamic essential to understanding Williams), his love and mastery of fishing as an example of his striving for excellence in everything he undertook, his relationships with his wives, other women, and his children, his vibrant second act in retirement, and finally a detailed examination of the dark cryonics affair, which, sadly, dominated the Williams postmortems.

What I discovered in my many years of research surprised me. Ted, it turned out, had gone to considerable lengths to conceal the fact that he was Mexican-American out of fear that his baseball career might be jeopardized by the prejudice of the day. In addition, the Williams war years seemed even more remarkable when compared to the virtually unfathomable prospect of a modern superstar athlete putting his career aside to serve in two wars. Yet it was curious that historians glossed over the fact that Williams initially sought a deferment in World War II and actively tried to avoid being recalled for Korea.

Ted’s boiling anger—rage, really—particularly piqued my curiosity: where it came from, how he managed it, and how he failed to manage it. On the field he was able to use it as a tonic to fuel hitting tears—often using the press as his foil. At other times he used it to manufacture a controversy or portray himself as the maligned victim of ink-stained wretches, most of whom actually gave him rave notices. But in his personal life, the anger often made him dysfunctional and unable to sustain relationships with loved ones. He’d had three wives and a handful of serious relationships with other women, two of whom, I learned, he’d proposed to. He’d lived with another woman for nearly twenty years at the end of his life, and hardly anything was known about that relationship. And he’d had three children: a daughter by his first marriage, Bobby-Jo, whom he’d grown estranged from, and a son and daughter from his third marriage, John-Henry and Claudia.

The first Mrs. Williams, Doris Soule, had died in 1987. Tracking down Lee Howard, Ted’s second wife, in October of 2002 and persuading the former Chicago model to publicly discuss her life with Williams for the first time gave me an early insight into the joy and misery of loving the Kid. But the most important breakthrough came in the spring of 2004, when, after nearly two years of saying no, Ted’s two daughters agreed, quite separately, to give me their first substantive interviews about growing up with their famous father.

Bobby-Jo, speaking for two days in Florida with her husband, Mark Ferrell, at her side, was still traumatized by the fact that Ted’s body had been frozen, or cryonically

preserved, a decision driven by John-Henry that might have remained a deep family secret had she not alerted the press. Bobby-Jo had threatened to go to court to try to get her father's remains taken out of the Arizona cryonics facility that held them on the grounds that his will specified he had wished to be cremated, but she'd been forced to drop her challenge when she ran out of money. She spoke of how hard it had been to please her father when she was growing up, of his bouts of anger, which were so intense she thought he was mentally ill, and of her gradual isolation and estrangement from Ted as an adult—aided and abetted, she thought, by John-Henry as he came to play a more dominant role in his father's life. Bobby-Jo was a wounded, fragile figure, and before long she went underground, moving to Tennessee and cutting herself off completely from many of her friends.

Claudia, after initially appearing more distrustful than Bobby-Jo, ended up speaking with me extensively. We had sixteen formal interviews over sixteen days spanning 2004 through 2006. Many of these sessions were in Ted's Florida house, and she came to allow me to remain in the house by myself, free to rummage around as I pleased through his papers, records, scrapbooks, letters, journals, wartime pilot's logs, and fishing logs. This sort of stuff is a biographer's dream and yielded nuggets such as Ted's private address book, containing names of many people I'd never heard of but who ended up providing useful insights about Williams when interviewed; letters from people such as Richard Nixon, Bob Feller, and John Updike; copies of little-known speeches Ted delivered while working for Sears, Roebuck; and various audio-and videotapes of Williams interviews, one dating back to 1946. Claudia also shared Ted's private family photos, tape recordings, and videos with me, and helped persuade her mother—Ted's third wife, Dolores Williams—to give me her first interview. Like Bobby-Jo, Claudia provided important insights into growing up with Ted—his view of women, his anger, his insecurity, and his record as a father. But perhaps the most significant thing she supplied was her family's first full explanation, including many new details, of the cryonics affair.

I think Claudia's main motivation in cooperating with me to the extent that she did was that she thought I would give John-Henry a fair hearing, and I made every effort to do that—to go beyond the way he'd been caricatured in the press as Ted's scheming bad seed. Like his sisters, John-Henry himself had initially declined to talk to me, then he agreed, but contracted leukemia and became too ill to be interviewed. He died in March of 2004, less than two years after his father. Then he had his body frozen at the same cryonics facility in Arizona that held Ted's remains.

After having little to do with any of his children as they grew up, Williams reached out to John-Henry, in particular, at the end. Ted wanted to make up for all the years he'd been absent, and in the process he overcompensated by ceding total control of his affairs during the final decade of his life to his untested son, who was then just coming of age, in his early twenties. John-Henry eagerly seized the reins with a mixture of exploitation, love, and devotion. The last part of the book is the story of a father and a son discovering each other during a difficult but poignant period of symbiotic dependency.

Researching and writing this book took me more than a decade. After six-hundred-odd interviews, uncounted hours of research in archives and among the private papers given to me by the Williams family, after looking closely at that signed baseball more

than a few times and thinking hard about the man I'd briefly met as a boy and the man I was meeting now, I felt ready to let go of this Ted Williams tale, the story of an exceptional, tumultuous, and epic American life—an immortal life.

*Ben Bradlee, Jr.*  
*August 2013*

## Introduction

The Kid appeared in the small room on the night of July 5, 2002. Video cameras rolled, and the flashbulbs popped—just as if he were making another star turn of the sort he had made so many times throughout his celebrated life.

About thirty people had anxiously awaited the arrival of Ted Williams—the great Teddy Ballgame himself: American icon, last of the .400 hitters, war hero, world-class fisherman, perfectionist, enfant terrible. Yet this was no press conference, no card show, no charity event or meet and greet, where Ted would wave and say a few words to the faithful.

For he was dead, after all. Quite dead.

Williams had passed away some twelve hours earlier in Florida, at the age of eighty-three, and then been secretly flown on a small chartered jet to Scottsdale, Arizona, outside Phoenix. There his body had been loaded onto an ambulance and taken, in a motorcade, to the place where this small crowd awaited him, in an operating room at a company called the Alcor Life Extension Foundation, located just a mile from the Scottsdale airport.

Alcor was then, and remains today, the leading practitioner of cryonics, a fringe movement that freezes people after they die in the hope that medical technology will someday advance to the point where it will be possible to stop or reverse the aging process and cure now-incurable diseases. At that point, cryonics—not to be confused with cryogenics, the mainstream science that studies how various materials react to extremely low temperatures—aspires to thaw out its frozen charges and bring them back to life. Alcor froze its first “patient,” as it calls its customers, in 1976. By the time Ted arrived, twenty-six years later, the group said it had frozen forty-nine people and had 590 living “members”—those who’d signed up to undergo the procedure when they die and who paid \$400 in annual dues in the meantime, while they waited.

On Alcor’s macabre menu, people have two basic options. The first is called a whole-body procedure, in which the entire body is frozen. The second is known as the neuro, in which only the head is frozen and preserved after being severed from the torso, which is then cremated or buried. A third variation provides for freezing both the torso and the head separately. Alcor stores both the bodies and the heads in huge, Thermos bottle-like tanks known as Dewars, which are filled with liquid nitrogen cooled to minus 321 degrees Fahrenheit.

In 2002, the whole-body procedure cost \$120,000, the neuro \$50,000. Among cryonicists, the neuro was becoming the preferred option. It was cheaper, for one thing, though Alcor liked to say that both procedures were easily affordable through life insurance. Most important for Alcorians, the head contains the brain, which they

consider by far the most important organ in the body because it holds the memory. When the patient comes back to life, or is “reanimated,” in cryosleep, he (the believers are overwhelmingly male) will want to remember from whence he came. Furthermore, the brain is the hardest organ to replace. With stem cell research and other advances on the horizon, it will be possible to regenerate tissue, and therefore simply grow a new body beneath your old head. Or so the hope goes.

Inside the Alcor operating room, it took five or six people to lift Ted out of the Ziegler case—the airtight metal container that airlines require for shipping bodies—in which he’d arrived. Under instructions from Alcor, a Florida mortician had filled the box with ice, a cryonics staple applied to the body immediately after death in order to keep it as cool as possible and to help preserve vital organs.

Ted’s body was placed on the operating table, faceup. Attendants quickly pressed fresh bags of ice against his skin, especially around the head, neck, and groin. The table was surrounded by a custom-made six-inch-high white plastic wall to contain the ice and to keep excess fluids from spilling onto the floor during the upcoming operation, which would last about four hours. Technicians then began connecting the major blood vessels to a perfusion machine, which would replace the blood with so-called cryoprotectant solutions. These chemicals, similar to antifreeze, were designed to help prevent the formation of ice crystals, which could cause further cell damage before the intense cooling process could begin.

The Alcor staff then started to drain blood and water from Ted’s body in what Alcor called a washout, replacing them with glycerol and another cryoprotectant known as B2C, which was used for the head only. Then, using a perforator, a standard neurological tool that looks like an electric drill, a surgeon and his assistant bored two small holes on either side of Ted’s skull so that the surface of the brain could be examined during the perfusion process to guard against swelling. Small wire sensors were inserted into each hole to be used to detect cracking of the skull during the freezing process later.

A green-and-white tube popped out of the perfusion machine, disrupting the washout process and causing “lots” of Williams’s blood to surge over the protective plastic wall on the operating table and spill onto the floor, according to the OR notes, which were taken in an informal style by the lay girlfriend of one of the Alcorians.<sup>1</sup> About forty-five minutes later, the surgeon “shut down some tube accidentally” on the machine, and the pressure ratcheted up too quickly, the notes reported, causing the mix of blood and chemicals to pump through Ted’s system at too high, and then at too low, a level. An “enormous amount of arterial leakage,” with blood flowing from Williams’s left eye, was also noted.<sup>2</sup>

Soon the surgeon announced that he was ready to perform the “cephalic isolation.” This meant Ted Williams’s head was now ready to be cut off. The surgeon took out a carving knife and began to cut—starting below Ted’s neck, slicing through tissue and bone, working his way down through the sixth cervical vertebra, at the top of the spine. At one point, the going slow, the surgeon remarked that he wished he had an electric knife. Finally, he switched to a bone saw to finish the job, and at 9:17 p.m. mountain time, the head of the greatest hitter who ever lived had been sliced off.

After Ted's head was severed, it was put into a small plastic container and taken to an adjoining room known as the "neuro cool-down area." There it was placed into a small Dewar connected to a larger Dewar filled with liquid nitrogen. The larger Dewar then began pumping nitrogen gas cooled to minus 202 degrees at a high velocity into the smaller Dewar containing Ted's head. This went on for about three hours. The goal was to cool all parts of the head below the glass transition temperature, minus 191 degrees, as quickly as possible, after which it would be vitrified, or reach an ice-free state.

Over the next two weeks, a head would normally be placed in a cylindrical tank known as an LR-40 and gradually cooled further, to minus 321 degrees, the temperature at which it would be deemed fit for permanent storage. But in this case, the Alcorians chose to put Ted's head inside what they called their Cryostar, an intermediate cooling facility where heads were sometimes stored during the freezing process. The Cryostar was supposed to limit the cracking of the brain that normally occurred as the head was frozen, but the machine was malfunctioning, causing its temperature to fluctuate. As a result, Ted's brain may have been subjected to more cracking, not less.

The procedure took more than three hours to complete. Ted's torso was taken to what Alcor called its whole-body cooling bath, a large, thermally insulated rectangular box filled with silicone oil cooled by dry ice. Two drums of oil were at the foot of the bath, connected by a pipe. The torso was wrapped in protective plastic and strapped to a wire-mesh stretcher before being lowered into the oil bath. A lid was placed over the bath, and a pump circulated the oil amid chunks of dry ice, cooling the torso to minus 110 degrees at a rate of 32 degrees per minute. Then Ted's body was removed and deposited in a large Dewar, where, like his head, it would be cooled further over a period of two weeks.

Each Dewar is ten feet tall, a little more than three feet in diameter, and weighs about 5,400 pounds when full. The capacity is four bodies and five heads. The bodies are wrapped in insulated bags and put inside an aluminum container called a pod. Four pods ring the inside circumference of a Dewar, and in the middle is the "neuro column," which consists of five large cans about the size of lobster pots, each resting on a shelf, one on top of the other. Each can contains a head.

An eyebolt is screwed into the bone below the neck to make it easier to handle the head when necessary. The heads lie upside down, resting on a can of Bumble Bee tuna, or if a head is larger than normal, perhaps a can of Dinty Moore beef stew. "They wanted the heads resting on something, not just setting at the bottom of the stockpot," said Cindy Felix, a former facilities operations manager at Alcor. "It's amazing some of the things they did. They were so high-tech in some areas but almost medieval in others—like the tuna can."<sup>3</sup>

Whole bodies, those with the heads still attached, hang in the Dewars upside down. "We protected the head by putting it at the bottom, so that the last thing to be uncovered and thawed in the worst-case scenario is the brain, because we care about the identity and the personality, and most of that is encoded in the brain," said Tanya Jones, then Alcor's chief operating officer.<sup>4</sup>

After Ted's long procedure was over, the Alcorians were tired but jubilant. Here was the celebrity who could transform cryonics and give it some legitimacy, the kind

of boost Walt Disney's preservation might have given the movement—had it actually happened and not merely been urban legend.

Of course, for the moment, at least, the company couldn't say anything because of patient confidentiality rules. And John-Henry Williams, Ted's son, was keeping them to that. Holding a sweeping power of attorney and health proxy for his father, John-Henry, thirty-three, had become a cryonics disciple. He'd been in secret talks with Alcor for more than a year about freezing Ted when the time came and had given the company strict instructions not to tell anyone his father was there. Alcor executives hoped they could eventually persuade John-Henry to let them go public—perhaps in return for a price concession. Meanwhile, Ted—his head now in a pot, his torso in a pod—settled in to await what would be his greatest comeback ever.

The fundamental question of whether Williams wanted his body to be in the place it now was—an Arizona cryonics facility—and decapitated, at that, was very much in doubt. He had never submitted an application to Alcor or signed up for the cryonics procedure himself, as is standard practice among the facility's other clients. John-Henry had only faxed Alcor a completed application on his father's behalf about six hours after Ted was pronounced dead. Moreover, Ted's will, last revised in 1996, had specified that he wanted to be cremated, not frozen, and he had told scores of friends and associates over the years, at least one as late as 2002, that his wishes were to have his ashes scattered off the Florida Keys, where he had fished for years, along with the ashes of his beloved dog, a Dalmatian named Slugger, who had died in 1999.

John-Henry knew that Ted's will specified he wished to be cremated, and he also knew that his half sister, Bobby-Jo Williams Ferrell, was vehemently against the idea of her father being frozen. She had told John-Henry so directly when he asked her to consider cryonics for Ted a year before. Bobby-Jo had also notified Alcor by e-mail on the day Williams died, when his body was still in Florida, that she opposed the procedure.

The preparation of Ted's 1996 will, which was a revision of earlier drafts he had made over the years, was overseen by Eric Abel, a Williams family attorney. John-Henry had confided in Abel about his plans to freeze Ted several years before his death, and Abel had advised him on the issue. Abel said he counseled John-Henry that because of Ted's stated preference for cremation in his will, it would be prudent for John-Henry to get something in writing from his father, preferably notarized, saying that he now wanted to be cryonically preserved. But after Ted died and his body was flown to Alcor, Abel said he didn't know if John-Henry had obtained such a statement, nor did he ask him if he had.<sup>5</sup>

Besides facing opposition from Bobby-Jo on freezing Ted, John-Henry also encountered resistance from his younger sister, Claudia Williams. But Claudia said she gradually came around to the idea, and that while their father was initially dismissive of cryonics, she and John-Henry were able to convince him and gain his approval in November of 2000 during a private meeting in Ted's hospital room, shortly before he had a pacemaker installed to boost his failing heart. Claudia and her brother also felt they could dispose of his body as they saw fit. "As far as I was concerned, our father had died, and John-Henry and I could do whatever we wanted with our father," she

said.<sup>6</sup>

Having no idea Williams had been frozen, his many fans were left to ponder the Kid's legacy: his magnificent .406 mark in 1941, achieved on the last day of the season, when Ted, in perhaps the defining moment of his career, declined the invitation of his manager to sit out the final day of the year to protect his .39955 average, which would have been rounded to .400, and proceeded to go 6–8 playing both games of a doubleheader; and his consistent flair for delivering other dramatic moments—such as winning the 1941 All-Star Game for the American League with a three-run homer in the bottom of the ninth inning, surviving a fiery crash landing in his jet after getting shot down by enemy gunfire in Korea, and hitting a home run on his last time at bat in 1960. They remembered Williams as the driven perfectionist; his swagger, style, and panache in the batter's box—a shade under six foot four, skinny and loose, hips swaying back and forth, bat cocked close to his body, hands grinding, then unleashing, at the last possible second, his perfect, slightly uppercut swing—and the what-ifs of how much grander his final numbers would have been had he not lost nearly five seasons in his prime fighting two wars, tempered by the realization that serving in the wars had also enhanced his legacy immeasurably. And they recalled the way he loped around the bases in his distinctive home-run trot, head always tucked way down; the way his explosive, often dark persona regularly made more news than his exploits on the field as he feuded with, gestured toward, and spat at a small faction of fans who delighted in taunting him and as he carried on a running war with the sportswriters who, he felt, had pried unjustifiably into his life and knocked him unfairly; and how despite such crude outbursts, Williams consistently demonstrated a basic sense of generosity and kindness, especially through his work for the Jimmy Fund, a charity for children with cancer, for which he raised millions of dollars over the years.

Ted was an original; not a traditional, modest, self-effacing hero but brash, profane, outspoken, and guileless. Self-taught and inquiring, he excelled as a Marine fighter pilot and became one of the most accomplished fishermen in the world. For better *and* worse, he was always his own man, never a phony—characteristics that helped him outlast his critics and win widespread affection and admiration as he aged. He had three favorite songs, which he played in his mind to help him fall asleep: “The Star-Spangled Banner,” “The Marines’ Hymn,” and “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.”

On visits to Boston long after he retired, Williams was struck by how people fawned and fussed over him, puzzled that he seemed more popular in retirement than he was during his playing days. The best evidence of this was his reception at the 1999 All-Star Game at Fenway Park. Ted, by then fragile and ailing, was driven out on the field in a golf cart to a thunderous ovation, and then, in a memorable scene, swarmed by a new generation of All-Star players who knew they were in the presence of baseball royalty. The players lingered, wanting to soak in the moment and bask in Williams's glow.

Of course all the obituaries listed Ted's key batting statistics, representing the spine of his twenty-two-year career: the .344 lifetime average, six batting titles (he led the league two more years, in 1954 and 1955, but injuries and walks prevented him from getting enough at bats to qualify for the batting titles in those years), two Most

Valuable Player awards, two Triple Crowns, and 521 homers. He was selected an All-Star eighteen times.

Out of 7,706 at bats, Ted had nearly three times as many walks (2,021) as strikeouts (709), and he retired with a .482 on-base percentage—baseball’s best ever. That meant he reached base nearly every other time he came up. He was second in all-time slugging percentage at .634, behind Ruth’s .690. He led the league in homers four times and RBIs four times, in runs scored six times, walks eight times, slugging percentage eight times, and on-base percentage twelve times.

Ted’s .388 average in 1957, at age thirty-nine, was nearly as remarkable as his .406 year. Though injured, he won the batting title, then promptly did it again in 1958, at the age of forty. “If in the end I didn’t make it as the greatest hitter who ever lived—that long ago boyhood dream—I kind of enjoy thinking I might have become in those last years the greatest old hitter who ever lived,” Ted wrote in his autobiography, *My Turn at Bat*.

During each Williams at bat, something between a hush and a buzz suddenly filled the air as the crowd shifted from autopilot engagement to edge-of-the-seat anticipation. “I was looking around for a story one day, and someone said there was this blind guy on the first-base line,” remembered Tim Horgan, who covered the Red Sox for the *Boston Herald* and then the *Boston Evening Traveler* in the 1950s. “I went up to the man and said, ‘Pardon me for asking, but why do you come to the park? Why not listen to the game on the radio?’ He said, ‘I love the sounds of the game when Ted comes up.’”<sup>7</sup>

Red Sox fans and the rabid press corps that covered the team seemed as captivated by Ted’s personality as they were by his slugging. He was a prickly prima donna whose much-chronicled “rabbit ears” had an unerring ability to zero in on even a few scattered boos amid all the cheers. He seemed immune to receiving praise but generally couldn’t tolerate criticism. On the field, his moods ranged from sheer joy and exuberance during his rookie year in 1939 to rage and petulance later in his career.

Williams reasoned that he was an expert at what he did, was trying his best to do even better, and thus resented any criticism. From 1940 to his last game in 1960, he swore off the time-honored baseball convention of tipping his hat to the fans. Once, after a spring training game in Miami in 1947, Ted appeared to doff his cap as he crossed home plate after hitting a home run. So alert was the press to Williams’s every move that the *Boston Globe*’s beat writer at the time, Hy Hurwitz, rushed to the clubhouse after the game and asked Ted if he had, in fact, tipped his hat. He denied that he had and said he was merely mopping his brow. Whereupon Hurwitz famously wrote: “It was the heat, not the humility.”<sup>8</sup>

The self-made, intellectually curious Williams was ahead of his time in regarding hitting as a science worthy of study, experimentation, and technical analysis. He coddled the blunt instruments of his success: his bats. He boned them. He cleaned them with alcohol every night. He weighed them meticulously on small scales to make sure they hadn’t gotten slightly heavier through condensation. And, acting on the improbable suggestion of a teenage boy from Chelsea, Massachusetts, he even heated his bats to keep their moisture content low.

If anyone could get under Ted’s skin, it was reporters, a group he contemptuously called the Knights of the Keyboard. For most of Ted’s career, Boston had between

seven and nine daily newspapers, plus another half dozen or so from the surrounding communities, not to mention the New York and national press. It was the post-*Front Page* era, but Ted was still prime fodder for intense tabloid and circulation wars in Boston, his every move dissected, debated, analyzed, second-guessed, and, of course, photographed.

A voracious consumer of his own press, Ted ignored all the positive coverage and focused only on the negative. “There were 49 million newspapers in Boston, from the *Globe* to the Brookline Something-or-Other, all ready to jump us,” he whined in *My Turn at Bat*.<sup>9</sup> He was particularly sensitive about any stories that he felt delved unnecessarily into his private life, accused him of failing to hit in the clutch, or suggested that he was more interested in his own performance than that of the team.

It was natural for writers to despise Williams and fear him, because he treated them like dirt. But they also knew Ted was great copy, and if they could get him to talk, he was usually a terrific interview because he spoke with unvarnished candor. He was not above stirring the pot with reporters to give him something to be mad at if he felt he was losing his edge. He often said he hit better if he was mad. “He nurtured his rage,” as the writer Roger Kahn once put it.

If Ted had been quiet for a while, and perhaps not hitting as well as he normally did, the writers would learn to expect that he’d pick a fight with one or several of them, pop off, then usually go on a tear at the plate.

If Ted’s rages on and off the field dominated his public persona, his dedicated charitable work underscored his innate kindness. Once, after the Red Sox finished playing a night game in Washington, Ted chartered a plane and flew down to Raleigh, North Carolina, to spend five hours visiting a sick child, then flew back to Washington in time for an afternoon game the next day.

Every time Williams made a charitable visit on behalf of the Jimmy Fund or another organization, he would insist that no press coverage be allowed. If he saw a reporter or photographer, he would turn around and leave. He had a genuine, generous spirit and feared that press coverage might make people think he had some ulterior motive, such as trying to improve his churlish image. “He did not want to be thought of as a phony, I think,” said Tim Horgan.

In retirement, the public Ted blossomed. He was quickly inducted into the Hall of Fame, and in his acceptance speech made a totally unexpected, bald political statement that called on the lords of Cooperstown to lift their color ban and induct the old Negro League stars. The statement was courageous, earned Ted enormous goodwill among black players, and underlined his basic sense of fairness and decency. Later, he returned to baseball and did a turn as a manager for the Washington Senators, pursued big-time fishing and hunting around the world, made annual spring training forays to Florida on behalf of the Red Sox to work with young hitters, took bows at the White House, made his peace with the fans and press of Boston, dabbled in the memorabilia market, and was a goodwill ambassador for baseball. Unlike many old-timers who cling to their era while belittling and resenting modern players, Ted remained a fan of the game, heaped praise on current stars, and forged relationships with players such as Tony Gwynn and Nomar Garciaparra.

His private life, during and after baseball, was much more problematic. If, during his career, Ted was able to manipulate the rage that simmered inside him and turn it

into an on-field positive, off the field his inability to control his anger hurt him immeasurably in maintaining relationships—especially with his wives and children.

If he failed to perform a given task up to his own high standard, or if a friend or loved one did something in what he felt was an inept or shoddy manner, Ted would ignite. He could also be set off if he wasn't in control of a situation, or was not being accorded what he felt was proper deference. If the telephone rang at an inopportune or intrusive time, he might rip it from the wall and fling it across the room.

After seeing a lifetime's worth of these explosions close-up, Bobby-Jo Williams Ferrell concluded that her father had some kind of mental illness: "My dad was sick. And it's a damn shame that because he was Ted Williams, and because nobody wanted to tell him like it was, including myself, he suffered and progressively became more ill by the years. And I think even especially after he quit managing, he got worse and worse and worse."<sup>10</sup>

Gnashing of teeth was a telltale sign that Ted was getting ready to go off. "He would clench his teeth so hard it was like he was having a seizure," said Jerry Romolt, a memorabilia dealer who became a friend to Williams. "A fulmination. Then it would pass."<sup>11</sup>

That was the thing: the storms always passed, and usually quickly. But the price of being in Ted's orbit was that you had to endure the foul weather. "Sometimes he'd get so ticked off at me that the damndest things would come out of his mouth, and then he would feel bad about it, but he would never apologize," said former Red Sox shortstop Johnny Pesky. "He was a proud guy. Every time you'd ask him a question, he'd look at you and say, 'Why are you so goddamn dumb?' He said that about pitchers, too, and they didn't like it."<sup>12</sup> His language made even some other ballplayers blush. "He'd say things that I shudder to think about and would never repeat," said Milt Bolling, a Red Sox shortstop from 1952 to 1957.<sup>13</sup> If you called him on his behavior, or decided that absorbing a steady diet of such outbursts was too much to take, then so be it, good-bye, you were out. But if you could accept that the eruptions were just *Ted being Ted*, that he really meant no harm, and that he could in fact be charming and engaging after the storm had blown over and act as though nothing had happened, then you were in, and Ted was your loyal friend for life.

Bobby Doerr, the old Red Sox second baseman and dear friend to Ted, felt Williams's lash while fishing and on many other occasions, but accepted him unconditionally. "He'd be like a maniac," Doerr said. "Ted fought embarrassment. Anytime he was embarrassed over anything—if it was baseball, he'd throw the bat in the air; fishing, he'd break a rod; golf, he'd throw the club. He fought embarrassment terribly because he was a perfectionist."<sup>14</sup>

Would Doerr ever tell him he was out of line? "No—you never said anything to Ted. It wasn't going to do any good." Doerr was far from alone. Johnny Pesky, also one of Ted's closest friends on the team, thought most of his teammates were simply awestruck by Ted. "We were like a bunch of kids looking up to a schoolteacher," Pesky said. "Some of the guys called him God. They'd say, 'God has spoken.'"<sup>15</sup>

Williams had few close friends, but would embrace and cultivate friendships with perfect strangers. He preferred the company of the "little people" to hanging around other celebrities or swells. "If I said this guy was a reporter and he could make you or

break you, Ted would have nothing to do with the guy,” said Dave McCarthy, a former New Hampshire state trooper who became a confidant of Ted’s and a trustee of his estate. “But if I said, ‘I’d like you to meet a janitor who likes bone fishing,’ he’d talk all night. He was genuine about that. That’s what I loved about him.”<sup>16</sup>

Ted realized his behavior was a burden to others. “He said, ‘The people that really love me have had to endure more than you can possibly imagine, because I can’t control my temper,’ ” recalled Steve Brown, a Florida filmmaker and fisherman who became a confidant of Ted’s toward the end of his life.<sup>17</sup>

Some friends struggled with the notion that they were enabling Ted’s abusive conduct by not intervening. One was Elizabeth “Betty” Tamposi, daughter of the late Sam Tamposi, a longtime pal of Williams’s who was a Red Sox limited partner and real estate developer in New Hampshire and Florida. After long being exposed to the kind and humanitarian side of Ted, Betty Tamposi was startled to witness his abusive conduct, sometimes exacerbated by drinking. Once, enraged by something, he furiously beat his dog in frustration. Another time, she watched as he humiliated the woman he lived with late in life, Louise Kaufman, in front of others at a restaurant. “I think there were a lot of people that enabled behavior of Ted’s that was unacceptable,” concluded Tamposi, who served as an assistant secretary of state under President George H. W. Bush.<sup>18</sup>

The Red Sox themselves coddled and enabled Williams in several ways: moving the right-field fences in for him, letting him maintain rules that kept reporters out of the clubhouse for a period of time after games, tolerating his spitting and various other on-field flameouts, and looking the other way when he missed two months of one season just so he could get a better divorce deal.

And what was Ted Williams angry about, exactly? Most who knew him well thought the cause was rooted in resentment of his unhappy childhood in San Diego. His mother, May, was a well-known Salvation Army zealot, out all day and much of the night saving souls, leaving Ted and his younger brother, Danny, to fend mostly for themselves. His father, Sam, was a ne’er-do-well who ran a small photo shop, drank excessively, and showed little interest in either of his sons.

And unlike many professional ballplayers—most of them, probably—Ted was embarrassed that he never went to college and had no formal education beyond high school. In 1991, on the fiftieth anniversary of his .406 year, Harvard University wanted to give him an honorary degree, but he turned it down, feeling that he would have been out of place among the intelligentsia in Harvard Yard.

“It’s too bad he didn’t get to go to college,” said Dave Sisler, a Red Sox pitcher in the late ’50s and the son of Hall of Famer George Sisler. “He was very, very smart. I went to Princeton, and was around some guys with big IQs. I bet if he took the test, he would have done very well.”<sup>19</sup>

Ted certainly was inquisitive. He bought a set of encyclopedias in middle age and couldn’t wait to delve into them. He liked verbal jousting and a good argument, which he would often start on a given subject—after marshaling his facts in advance, the better to sandbag his opponent.

But facts were only part of it.

Bob Costas, the television broadcaster, interviewed Ted several times and found

him “curious about excellence. ‘How do you do what you do? Whatever it is you do, how do you do it?’ Curt Gowdy [the longtime Red Sox announcer] said he was the most capable man he ever knew. My [own] impression was if Ted was walking down the street and you said to him, ‘Over there is the best carpenter who ever lived,’ he’d have gone over and talked to the guy.”<sup>20</sup>

Williams would end up repeating some of his parents’ mistakes. He was repeatedly unfaithful and an absentee father himself. When Ted was introspective, he’d talk about his failures, according to Steve Brown. “He never talked about his accomplishments. He was humble. He looked at his failures very heavy. His biggest was as a father. He felt he’d never been a good father. He felt he had many areas to make up for.”

Added Manuel Herrera, one of Ted’s cousins: “Ted’s exact words to me were: ‘As a father, I struck out. I was for shit as a father. I was never there. I was always gone. I had my commitments. I just didn’t do the job.’ It was obscure to him. He didn’t know how to do it. I think Ted tried to compensate for being a lousy father by trying to help other kids.”<sup>21</sup>

Gino Lucero, a cousin on May Williams’s side of the family, said, “Ted was a great hero, and he was dysfunctional. When he was pissed, he was lethal. You had this anger thing that he courted, that he embraced. No matter how distasteful it was, he embraced it.

“He was a kid who wanted to fit in, and here’s his mom banging tambourines on a street corner and spreading the Gospel. Ted always gravitated to his friends’ fathers. Think about it. His dad had a photo business. His dad was never home. His dad was a drinker who showed no interest in Ted. How many men are screwed up because they were never validated by their fathers?”<sup>22</sup>

Manuel Herrera thought Ted hid his fears with anger: “We were driving back from LA once. I said, ‘Why were you so hard on the people in Boston?’ He says, ‘You know, I was afraid.’ ‘What were you afraid of?’ ‘I really don’t know what I was afraid of, but I didn’t want them to know I was poor, didn’t have a good home, didn’t have the intangibles. I didn’t want them to know my private life, so I backed them away with my anger. But despite all that they loved me.’”

The news of Williams’s passing hit hardest in Boston, where city flags were ordered flown at half-staff and talk radio began to give voice to a sense of communal grieving and remembering. At the Ted Williams Tunnel, which runs under Boston Harbor and had been dedicated in 1995, condolences were posted on electronic message boards. Newspapers ran updated obituaries of Williams that had been filed years ago; some papers ran special commemorative sections. Wondrous archival footage of the Kid in his prime aired on cable channels and on newscasts across America.

President George W. Bush, the über-baseball fan who had once owned the Texas Rangers and whose father, President George H. W. Bush, revered Ted, said of Williams’s nearly five-year-long military service as a Marine Corps pilot in both World War II and Korea: “Ted gave baseball some of its best seasons—and he gave his own best seasons to his country.”

Bob Feller, who once had said that trying to get his blazing fastball by Williams was “like trying to get a sunbeam by a rooster,” called Ted “the greatest hitter I ever

faced.” And Yogi Berra, the old Yankees catcher, who used to enjoy needling Williams and trying to distract him as he stood in the batter’s box waiting to hit, echoed Feller and scores of others in concluding that Ted “sacrificed his life and career for his country. But he became what he always wanted to be: the greatest hitter ever.”

At the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York, events scheduled for the day Ted died were canceled. Officials placed a wreath under Ted’s plaque and flowers under his life-size statue, which stands next to Babe Ruth’s in the entrance to the museum. Around Major League Baseball, stadiums held moments of silence and lowered their flags. At Fenway Park in Boston that night, where the Red Sox were playing the Detroit Tigers, the grounds crew carved Ted’s number, 9, into the left-field grass. A lone bugler played taps at the base of the 9 as a Marine honor guard carried the flag. Both teams stood along the baselines in tribute, the Red Sox with black armbands on their right sleeves. A long-stemmed red rose was placed in the right-field bleachers on seat 21, row 37, section 42, where Ted had hit a massive 502-foot home run in 1946, crushing the straw hat of the man sitting in the seat.

Ty Cobb may have hit for a higher average, and Babe Ruth with more power, but nobody combined power and average the way Williams did. He was a pure hitter—no fielder or a complete player—and never pretended or aspired to be anything else. “They don’t pay off on fielding,” as he once explained it.

Williams pioneered the use of a lighter bat—once considered heresy for sluggers—arguing that bat speed, not heft, was the key to power. Over the course of his entire career, Ted studied pitchers intently for their tendencies and quizzed hitters about what a pitcher threw to them in what situation. “Ted always said: ‘I don’t guess what they throw. I *figure* what they’re going to throw,’ ” said Tom Wright, a backup outfielder and pinch hitter for the Sox from 1948 to 1951.<sup>23</sup>

And his hitting credo was simple: get a good pitch to hit. Critics said he followed this rule to the extreme by refusing to chase a pitch that was even an inch off the strike zone, thereby hurting his team by having its best hitter often pass up an opportunity to drive a runner home. But Ted made the slippery-slope counterargument: that if he chased a pitch an inch from the plate, it would only encourage pitchers to throw two inches outside the zone, then three inches, and so on. History has vindicated Ted’s approach, and there is now broad acceptance of the value of reaching base, or having a high on-base percentage—a statistic that was not appreciated and barely even kept in Williams’s day.

His eyesight was exceptional, and his command of the strike zone so renowned that opponents often complained that the umpires effectively gave him four strikes. The umps loved Ted because he never showed them up by arguing a call. One oft-told story, perhaps apocryphal, has it that when a catcher beefed about a pitch that had been called a ball, the umpire told him: “Mr. Williams will let you know when your pitcher throws a strike.”

A small minority of Ted’s teammates was less charitable, and resented his aloof, individualist persona and his temper tantrums, but most liked and admired him enormously, even worshipped him. “You’re not going to like everybody or be liked by everybody,” said Ted Lepcio, a Red Sox infielder from 1952 to 1959. “Geniuses have their own intricacies, and maybe that best describes Ted. He had a hard time