

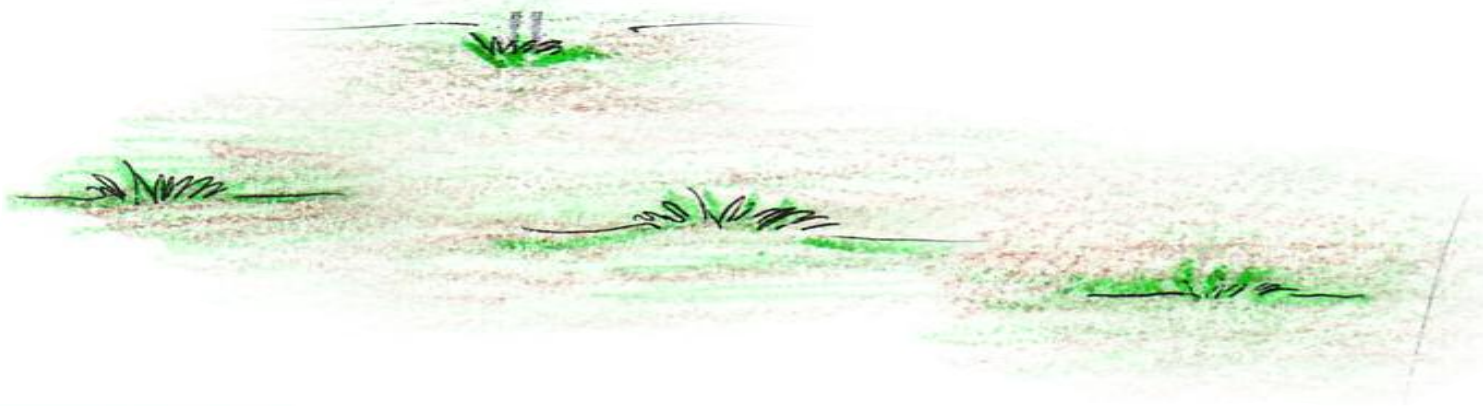
Spring Training

**By and Based on the Books of
Robert J. Comier www.thefaithkit.org**

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Illustrated by Rosa Rosado

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Tommy knew this day would come. He had been worrying about it since the day he had entered high school in September. This had made a bad deal worse. A new school. A big new school. New subjects. New expectations. Lots and lots of new kids to deal with. And sports too....

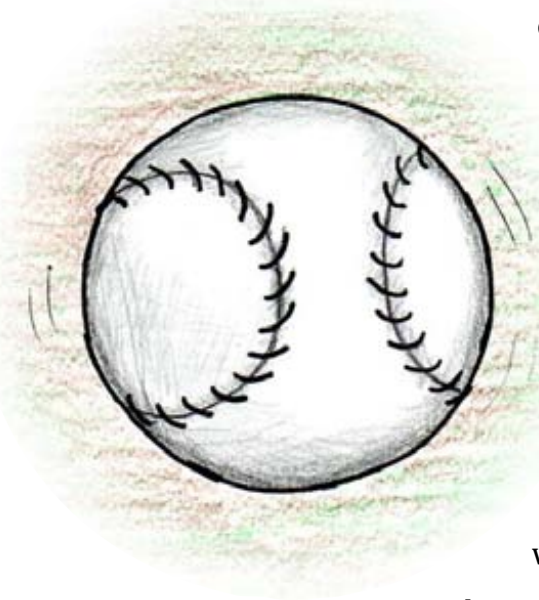
Football was out of the question. He was too light.

Basketball was not an issue. He was too short.

But baseball. Baseball was supposed to be his game. He was not too light nor too short. He was a star in the neighborhood. He followed his team, and talked about baseball all the time. It was expected that he would try out. This tough year was sure to get tougher.

It had been a tough year, and it was from the beginning. He had not wanted to go to that big school. It was too big, and too many of those who went there had the reputation of being too tough. Although he was entering with several friends, there were many more new people, and most were bigger and, it seemed, cooler and it seemed that many had come with more friends.

From the first, Tommy felt very (unnaturally) quiet around all these people, and very unsure of himself if ever anyone expected him to speak. (It was even hard for him to say “present.”) He was self-conscious every time he dropped a book—which was too often—and too happy to follow behind in going from class to class.



When the grades starting coming he saw that he was doing OK, which was a bit of a relief, but not much because other people were doing better, and there were still others who appeared quite happy not doing much at all.

School was no fun, and his biggest joy was going home.

It's not that anyone was bad to him—except that one ___ from the other side of town. Even that wasn't so bad because a lot of people hated that ____. No, the problem was people in general. Weirdly, he was worried about how he looked to other people, and at the same time bothered that other people didn't pay much attention to him. This sort of made him mad.

Worse than this, as the year went on he was also beginning to get mad at himself—because he was not as smart as this one, not as good-looking to girls as that one, nor a star on the football team nor the basketball team....

And now it was time for baseball. At least he didn't even tryout for football or basketball. That way he didn't have to look bad at something important, and then get cut—with the first cuts!

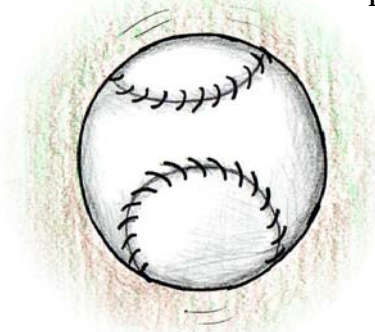
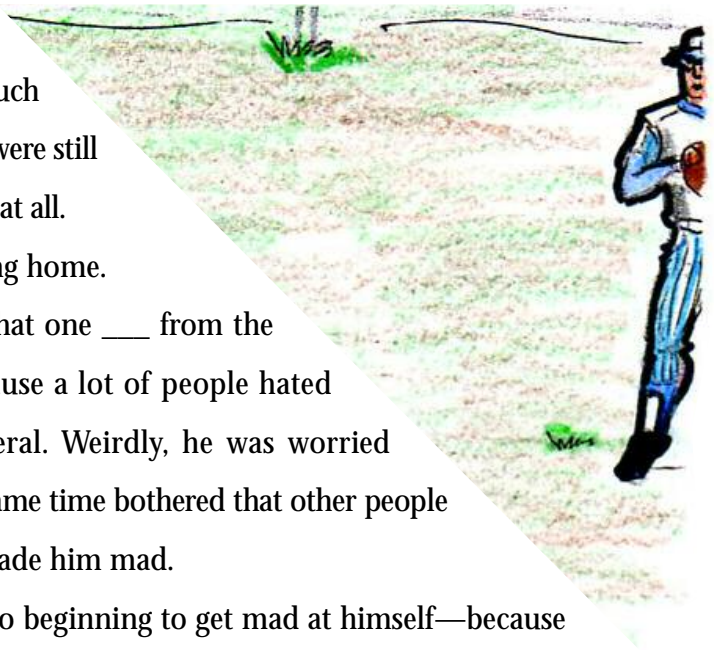
But how could he explain to his family that he wasn't going to try out for baseball? How could he explain it to those good friends that he had made, who thought that he was good at sports?!

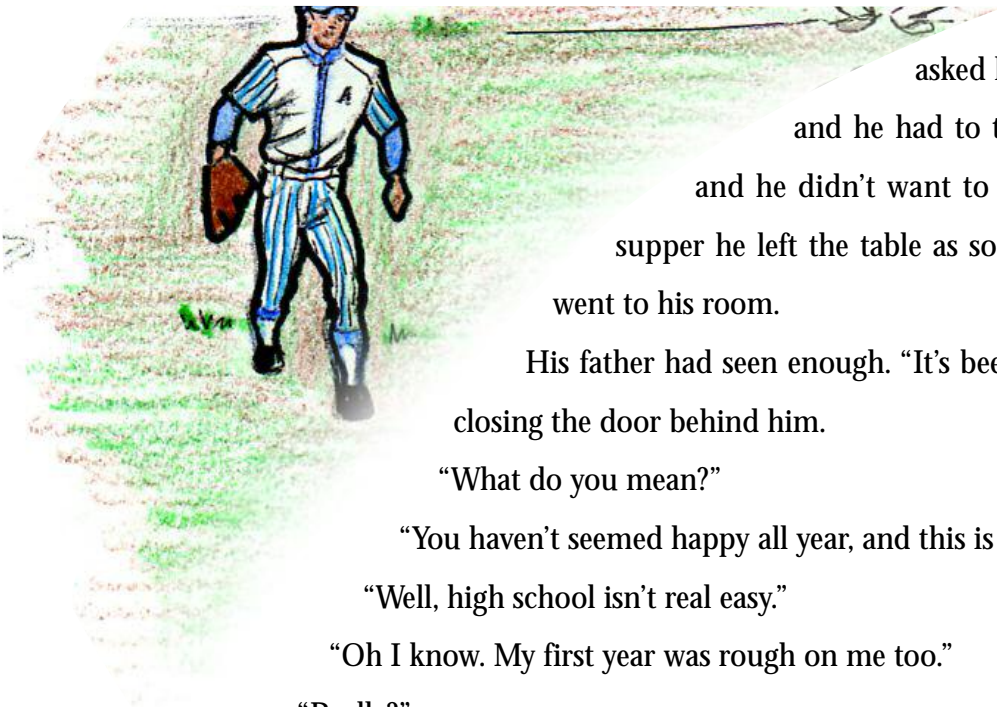
He was sick to his stomach the first day of tryouts.

The coach was not a bad guy, and he asked him what position he thought he could play. He said "second or center," which made him sound like he knew what he was talking about. He was sent out to center. He got a slow start on the first ball that was hit to him—but he caught it. His first throw was on line—but it was short. Basically, that's how it went. Even before batting he was asking himself whether it would be better to be cut because he could see that he wasn't going to start.

In the end, because he was at the end of the line and it was getting dark, he got only a couple of swings. He was mostly relieved that he fouled the first one off, and though he missed a couple completely, he also managed a couple of hard grounders towards the middle, and that was enough. Two days later, he didn't know exactly what to feel when he found out that he had actually made the team.

He didn't play in their first game. It was an away game, and in the bus on the way there he was nervous that they might put him in, and on the way back he was embarrassed that they did not.





When he got home, they asked him how it went at his first game, and he had to tell them that he had not played, and he didn't want to say anything else about it. After supper he left the table as soon as they would let him and he went to his room.

His father had seen enough. "It's been a rough year, hasn't it," he said closing the door behind him.

"What do you mean?"

"You haven't seemed happy all year, and this is not you."

"Well, high school isn't real easy."

"Oh I know. My first year was rough on me too."

"Really?"

"Absolutely. For me, the problem was fitting in. It took me a whole year to figure out who I was."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, looking back on it—I didn't exactly know this then—I was just too into comparisons. Who's better at this, who's better at that? Who is cool? Why am I none of the above? Why am I 'nobody'? I thought about this kind of stuff all the time. It was making me crazy."

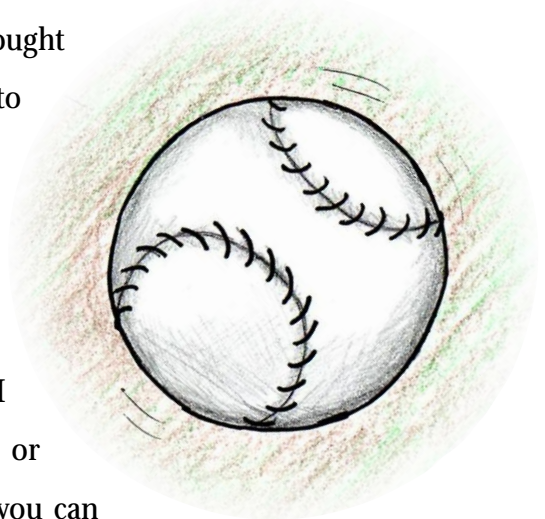
Tommy's father had his attention. "So what did you do about it?" asked Tommy.

"Well, and again, this is in retrospect, I think I realized that I had to make a decision. I kind of remember asking myself: Who makes who you are? Who decides who you are, other people—or you?"

"I got to thinking," Tommy's father went on, "that I was playing other people's game, thinking that I had to be good at what *they* thought was important. And then I said to myself, 'why?' Then I said to myself, 'what are *you* interesting in being good at?' That's when I started to get serious about computers."

"Was it really that easy?"

"It *wasn't* easy. It's *still* not easy, and I have to remind myself of everything I just told you all the time. But at least I had figured out the issue: Who decides who you are, you or other people? Who decides whether you are doing the best you can





with what you have been given? Who else even knows what you have been given?! Isn't being yourself the best—the coolest—thing a person can do? Isn't doing your best with what God gave you—or didn't give you—the holiest thing a person can do?"

"I thought it out, and then I noticed that I could just start choosing NOT to care about how I looked to other people. To help me NOT forget, I came up with a little slogan: "No2C's": no comparing yourself to others, and no criticizing yourself for things you cannot change. I wrote it on the cover of some of my books, and I wrote it on a card that was always on my desk. Pretty quickly life got easier. I got more relaxed. I started to have a little fun."

"I also think that I became a better friend to my friends. And, as you know, many of these guys are still my friends."



And then Tommy's father showed him the No2C's that he had in his wallet. "I showed this to Father Bob, and he said that he was going to do something with it for the whole church. For now I'll give you mine."

"Who decides who you are, you or other people? Why don't you think about it?"

Tommy did think about it. And he tried to put the idea into practice the same way his father did. Life did get a little easier. He got more relaxed. He started to have a little fun. And he even found that he played better, at least in practice.

The season went on. Tommy never became a starter, but he moved up among the subs. Meanwhile, the team moved up, and somehow managed to get into the title game with their archrivals, the Demons.

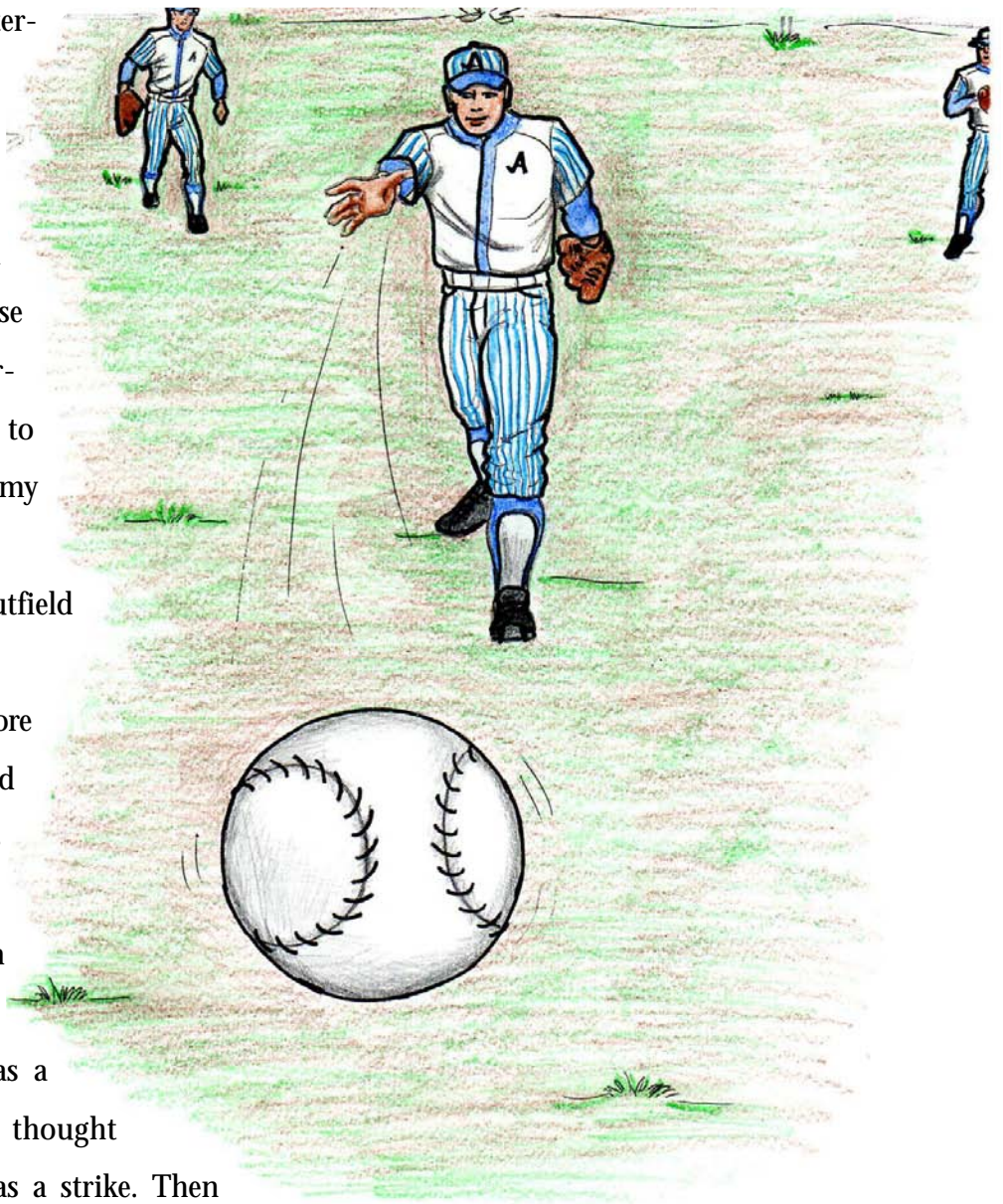
Tommy's team was out in the field in the top of the last inning with the score tied. A ball was hit sharply



to center and the starting center-fielder took off after it. He might have gotten it but he tripped on something and fell, and the ball got through, and the go-ahead run scored. Worse than that, the starting center-fielder was hurt, and he had to come out of the game, and Tommy had to take his place.

There was no play in the outfield before the inning ended.

Tommy saw it coming long before it happened. He was not scheduled to bat unless a lot of things happened. It was not likely but a lot of things happened. Men on second and third, two outs, Tommy up. The first pitch was a ball. "Maybe he'll walk me," thought Tommy. But the next pitch was a strike. Then another ball. Then he fouled one off. And then another ball. Full count. As the payoff pitch left the pitcher's hand Tommy saw that it was going to be a strike.



Dear reader,

I have decided not to finish this story. I'm just not sure what would make for the most meaningful ending, and so I am leaving this up to you. Think what you like. And think what you like of me. I will not be bothered in any case. Tommy, you see, is already my hero.

