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Wild Bill's Walk

Written By: Harry Gribnitz

The door in right field opened and "Wild Bill" strode toward the pitcher's mound. The appreciative Wrigley Field crowd rose to their feet with a thunderous ovation. As Bill crossed the infield dirt a man with crutches open his arms wide in preparation for a heartfelt hug. The scene brought a tear to the eyes of both men and to many of us watching in person or on national television. The fact that Wild Bill's First Pitch skipped into the glove of Kerry Wood behind the plate could not diminish the moment. Wild Bill Holden had completed his goal of walking almost 2100 miles from Prescott Valley, Arizona to Wrigley Field to raise \$250,000 for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

What could have inspired a 56 year old semi-retired teacher with bad knees to take on this mission? On New Year's Eve Bill Holden received a belated Christmas present from his son Josh. Bill slipped the video of "This Old Cub" into his VCR and settled in with snacks and a drink to enjoy the story of his favorite Cub, Ron Santo. The 90 minute inspirational film documents Santo's life and battle with diabetes. Santo life is chronicled from the heel clicking days of the 1969 pennant race to operations to remove parts of both legs because of complications from diabetes. Bill didn't watch the movie just once, he watched at least seven times before falling asleep about 4:30AM. He awoke with a plan.

Bill Holden was not a diabetic, but had seen the impact on his students during his teaching career. The impact on his students on the Indian Reservation had been particularly upsetting. "When they hired me on the reservation, the counselors sat me down and they said we had this epidemic of diabetes."

"Wild Bill's" walk started on Tuesday January 11th. The plan was to cover 12 miles per day and finish in Wrigley Field on July 1st. The trek took Bill across southern Arizona and New Mexico until he entered Texas passing near the little town of Santo. Bill turned north in the Dallas area and headed across Oklahoma, Missouri and finally Illinois. He was supported by the family of Cub fans (and even a few Cardinal's fans) every step of the way. "If you went to the moon, don't you think you'd find a colony of Cub fans? I do." He said.

I am not sure which story I found more inspirational, Ron Santo's story of courage, Wild Bill's Walk or my son Jim calling me to say his Sunday school class drove to Weatherford, Texas to walk with Mr. Holden for a day.

Thanks,

Harry Gribnitz

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PS: If you would like to learn more or to make a contribution, please go to www.thisoldcub.com.