



## "Moonlight" Graham, Robert Avant, and me

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Following family, the areas of my life that I would consider among my greatest passions are friends, family medicine, and baseball. With just a few months to go before I step aside from my role at the College, I have been thinking about the treasure chest of memories I have accumulated. One such memory embraces these passions that have come to mean so much to me.


Archibald "Moonlight" Graham was a rising star in the New York Giants' minor league system. On June 29, 1905, he was called up to "the show" for the last game of the regular season. In the eighth inning, Giant's manager, John McGraw, sent him in as a substitute outfielder. In the ninth, he was in the on-deck circle with a bat in his hand when the game ended. In the off-season Archie Graham was accepted to medical school and had to decide which life path to follow: big league baseball or medicine. He chose medicine and went on to become a family doctor in Chisholm, Minn, a small town about 150 km south of the Canadian border. "Doc" Graham loved kids and focused much of his almost 50 years of practice time on caring for the children of Chisholm. He received national recognition for his 13-year study of children's blood pressure—an early example of the value of family practice research. He was a much-loved family doctor—and a very talented baseball player who, the record books show, played in the major leagues for a total of 5 minutes and never had an official time at bat.

In the 1989 Academy Award-nominated movie *Field of Dreams*, based on the book *Shoeless Joe* by Canadian author W.P. Kinsella, Kevin Costner plays Iowa farmer Ray Kinsella. Ray's love of baseball inspires him to turn his cornfield into a baseball diamond where players from the past whose fates denied them the stardom they deserved can come and play. While the author's imagination clearly ran unchecked, the stories of each player depicted are true. "If you build it, he will come" became words that inspired Ray to pursue his dream and that led him and his spiritual guide, author Thomas Mann (played by James Earl Jones), to the town of Chisholm to find the now aging family physician, Archibald "Doc" Graham, sensitively portrayed by Burt Lancaster. In a poignant moment, when asked if it was not a tragedy that he played only a few minutes in Major League Baseball, Archie replies, "Son, if I'd only gotten to be a doctor for 5 minutes, now that would have been a tragedy." To celebrate the players depicted in the movie *Field of Dreams*, a limited number of baseball cards were issued by the Major League Baseball Hall

of Fame, including what is now a very special Archibald "Moonlight" Graham rookie card.

Dr Robert Avant is a soft-spoken, compassionate, accomplished, and very wise man and family physician who, over the past several decades, has been one of the outstanding leaders of our specialty in the United States and worldwide. He was the founding chair of the Department of Family Medicine at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn, has taught and published widely, has been the recipient of numerous important awards, and served for several years as the Executive Director of the American Board of Family Medicine, our College's sister organization responsible for certification of family physicians in the speciality of family medicine in the United States. Over the years Robert and I developed a strong professional relationship and a special friendship, sharing countless stimulating times together discussing the present and future of family medicine and the challenges facing our respective organizations and health care systems.

About 10 years ago, a week after a meeting that the CFPC hosted in Mississauga, Ont, I received a special package in the mail. Robert Avant, who had been at the meeting and who had shared several minutes with me enjoying the collection of baseball memorabilia I keep in my office, had sent me a gift. It was one of the special edition Archibald "Moonlight" Graham baseball cards. When the cards were released, a limited number were distributed among the families and a few selected others who were important to the memories of each of the players. Robert Avant was on that list because it was known how proud "Doc" Graham would have been to see his beloved field of family medicine become a respected discipline at the renowned Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, not far from his own home town. And it was understood how pleased he would have been to know that the head of that Mayo Clinic department was an accomplished family physician named Dr Robert Avant. But the deeper reason for Archie Graham's joy would have been that, for him, Dr Robert Avant was more than just another big-time university medical school professor and family medicine leader—he was actually a little boy named Bob who grew up in Chisholm; a little boy whose personal family doctor and career inspiration was Archibald "Moonlight" Graham.

Thank you Bob—and "Moonlight"—for the contributions each of you has made to what it means to be a family doctor—and for allowing me to experience the joy of connecting the passions I feel for friends, family medicine, and the game of baseball. 

Cet article se trouve aussi en français à la page 1047.