Lefty and the vet

Jeff McKay '65 and Bill Lee of Red Sox fame seek — and share — the 'way' of baseball

By Karl Lindhom '67

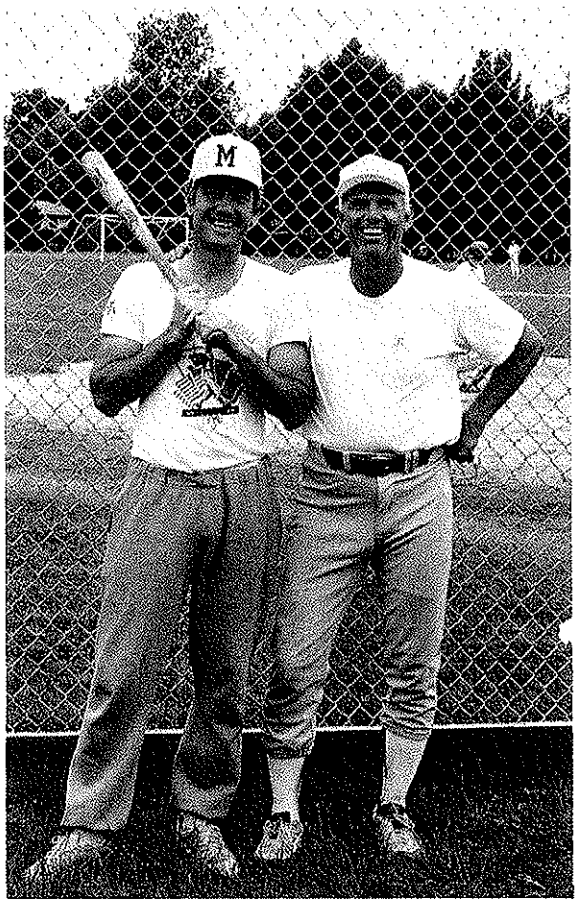
Jeff McKay sits in a large room in a building called the Cabin in the Field, holding a baseball. Surrounding him in two rows are 40 people, 37 men and three women. "I have an interest in Native American culture," McKay says, "and have traveled in the Northwest and Alaska trying to learn what I can about Indian ways. Along the way, I learned about the custom of the talking branch. At certain rituals, when someone in a group wants to speak, he or she is given a small branch to hold.

"The idea is that this talking branch, from the tree of life, can connect us to our experience, and remind us of where we have been and why we were there and can help us think and talk. Today," he continues, "we have played a lot of baseball, we've thrown this ball around, it has been our inanimate companion. Let's use it tonight the way those Indians used the talking stick, to help us connect to our experience in baseball this weekend and to one another."

In this way, Jeff McKay '65 begins the evening portion of the second day's program of a baseball workshop at the Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, N.Y.

After a short pause, Ron, an accountant from Trumbull, Conn., and three-year participant in the workshop, gestures for the ball and McKay throws it to him. Ron talks warmly of the fun he had playing baseball that day, the contrast of that innocent pleasure to his daily grind, and the good feelings he has for his teammates and fellow competitors. What follows is three hours of stimulating discussion and intimate revelation as the baseball is tossed around the room.

On Labor Day weekends for the past three years, the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies, a conference center about 20 miles east of Poughkeepsie, has offered a three-day baseball workshop, a "Field of Dreams" seminar called "Baseball: The Spirit and Practice of an American Myth."



'Paladins of the '60s': Jeff McKay '65, left, and Bill Lee, former Red Sox and Montreal Expos pitcher.

Jeff McKay is the program's progenitor and organizer, and one of its leaders. When he is not conducting baseball workshops (which is to say, most of the time), he is an educational entrepreneur, a counter-culture teacher whose specialty is wilderness education, building ropes courses and other outdoor challenges to help corporate executives, teachers, and young people learn about teamwork and sharing.

The other workshop leader is Bill Lee, a.k.a. "Spaceman," the former Red Sox and Expo pitcher, Presidential candidate (for the Rhinoceros Party), autobiographer (*The Wrong Stuff*, still in print), barnstormer, baseball entrepreneur. Lee lives now in Craftsbury, up in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, or at least that's the home base from which he dashes around the country, and the world, as a baseball emissary and player.

The Omega catalog describes the baseball weekend thus: "With bats and balls we explore baseball as a Way ... In a lighthearted approach that blends Eastern and Western styles — integrating yoga, meditation, breathing, and the martial arts and visualization — McKay and Lee apply Yogi Berra's sage observation: 'Ninety percent of the game is half mental.' "

McKay calls this Labor Day session an "alternative fantasy camp" for guys (and a few women) who "may have been cut from their Little League teams — or

never had a chance to play catch with their dads." The workshop occurs on the same weekend as "Beyond Basketball" with Phil Jackson, coach of the NBA champion Chicago Bulls, and "Zen and the Art of Business as a Force for Social Change," featuring Ben Cohen, of Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream, in addition to "Wellness" and "Empowerment" workshops.

An hour or so into the evening session, McKay calls for the ball. He talks of his interest in reconciling athletics with deeper human truths. His hope is to promote "competition with compassion" and he insists that it is possible to compete fiercely and still respect your opponent. With a shake of the head, he tells the anecdote of his last football game at Middlebury, a loss to UVM, when he ended the game in a fistfight with an anonymous Catamount whose only sin was to be on the winning side. "Now is that screwed up or what?" he asks the group.

He has found the perfect expression of his sports values in the prologue to Sadaharu Oh's extraordinary biography, *A Zen Way of Baseball*, and he reads aloud from the text every chance he gets. In the passage McKay offers at Omega, Oh describes his last home run: "(My) opponents and I were really one. My strength and skills were only half the equation. The other half was theirs. ... My baseball career was a long, long initiation into a single secret: That at the heart of all things is love. We are, each of us, one with the universe that surrounds us — in harmony with it, not in conspiracy against it."

After a respectful pause, Dave, a businessman from Baltimore, takes mild exception to McKay's model of compassionate competition, the idea of playing fiercely while maintaining humility and a love for your opponents. He says solemnly, "I wish I could accept what you say, Jeff, it appeals to me. But I honestly have to say that I think that hostility and intimidation play a role in sports. They're useful. With winning as a goal, I think negative passions have their place." In this setting, this statement hangs like heresy.

To this point in the evening, Bill Lee has sat somewhat outside the circle. He has not called for the ball, but has been an attentive listener. This dichotomy of fierce play and compassion intrigues him. "I gotta agree with you," he says to Dave. "I'm a mean sunovabitch when I pitch. Those hitters are trying to take the food out of my kids' mouths — that's how I look at it."

He goes on to tell the famous anecdote about Early Wynn, the hard-nosed Cleveland Indians pitcher. After his teenaged son hit a line drive off him in an informal batting practice, Wynn knocked the kid down with a well-directed fast ball in the vicinity of his ear. When asked about it, the Hall of Famer said, "I'll knock my mother down if she digs in on me."

"I'll tell you a story," Lee says. "Last spring, I'm playing for the town team, me and the rummies from Craftsbury, against the big boys from Barre. They get three runs off me in the first inning. We're kicking the ball around and I've got nothing.

"They're not content to score off us. No, they have to embarrass us. They're whooping and hollering in the dugout, making fun of us, high fives, forearm shots, the whole thing. Well, I'll tell you, the next inning when we go back out on the field, those bases are loaded real fast — I drilled the first three guys up. Three pitches, fast balls in the ribs. That shut 'em up. We win the game."

Lee pauses, struck by his role in this account, and speculates, "You know who I'm like? The guy in *The Grapes of Wrath* — Casy." He enters the circle of listeners and intones dramatically, "Wherever there's a fat kid who doesn't get picked on a team, I'll be there. Whenever there's a girl the boys won't let play, I'll be there. Whenever there's a guy who screws up and kicks away a game and needs a friend, *I'll be there!*"

He smiles broadly, turns, and sits down. This is a wonderful riff and the players, the conference participants, are clearly delighted. They are not bothered that the concept of competition and compassion has not been advanced by this portrayal of the vindictive hero smiting the enemy.

Ball in hand, McKay surveys the scene and suggests a five minute break.

In the mornings at Omega, McKay is responsible for hitting instruction. Lee takes care of everything else. Their minions are a varied collection of talents. A 17-year-old high school player, Danny, accompanies his uncle, Paul, fortyish, an independent filmmaker from western Massachusetts. The oldest attendee, Steve, a 58-year-old bachelor accountant from Dorchester, is also at the workshop for the third year: "I look forward to this all year long," he says. "All winter I think about coming here and playing a little ball with Bill and Jeff at the end of the summer."

Abby is a psychotherapist from New York City and pepperpot second sacker, who in the evening talks about her dad in Brooklyn and reads an essay she wrote entitled "God and Baseball." Reed-thin Joe is an organic farmer, a Yankee from southern Vermont, middle-aged, who takes life and his baseball fun very seriously. Defense is his passion and he is seen before breakfast oiling his glove. Each of the 40 participants brings his or her own idiosyncratic motivation and nature to this wild enterprise, sharing only the bond of baseball.

The team comes in all shapes and sizes with a wonderful array of near baseball gear. Most wear a T-shirt of their favorite team, with the Red Sox and Yankees predominating. One young man embraces Connecticut's baseball schizophrenia, wearing a Red Sox hat and a Yankee shirt. He actually hits well enough to play for the Red Sox.

The morning's hitting instruction begins with a half-hour general session as McKay explains the basic principles of hitting. "Get a firm base," he says. "Dig in to the dirt, feel a connection to the earth; get settled in your gut; let's hear a big grunt when you swing." A nice grunting competition ensues, and comments on how close the "om" of Yoga is to the sound of "home," the literal and metaphoric starting point and destination of the hitter/quester in baseball. And, of course, there are many plays on yoga and "Yogi," baseball's Buddha.

The setting at Omega is decidedly low tech, with the hitters congregating on three adjacent tennis courts. For the 45 minutes of group instruction, McKay forms his players into three parallel lines; then he breaks the group down into smaller teams of four or five for practice and individual instruction. Pitchers lob tennis balls to hitters who wallop them to shaggers in the parking lot next to the tennis courts.

McKay knows hitting is difficult, but doesn't feel it as a matter of great technical complexity. He is more of the "see it, hit it" school. His style is to ask lots of questions of the hitters, so that the students teach themselves: "Why do you think you missed that one? What could you have done differently?" Socrates in sweat pants. As with all hitting instruction, positive reinforcement is the rule: "*That* was a great swing. True, you missed the ball, but you're real close, and when you hit that sucker with that swing, you're gonna lose it!" A lined shot into the parking lot occasions paroxysms of whoops and hollers.

Emile is the rankest beginner of the lot, admitting to never having hit a "hard ball" in his life. McKay tries to give him a little rhythm and timing: "Now step toward the pitcher, now swing. That's all

there is to it — step and swing." For the rest of the morning, Emile can be heard reminding himself: "Step and swing." It becomes his batting mantra.

With each hitter, McKay tries to convey a fundamental principle that can be taken away from the weekend and practiced. His credo is "Be your own coach," which he learned from one of his earliest mentors, Benny Friedman, a New York Giants football player and college coach in the '40s and '50s. One of the regulars has shown up this year with a T-shirt that has "Be Your Own Coach" printed on the back.

At another location, Bill Lee is in charge of instruction in pitching and defensive alignments — though in fact defense quickly loses out to an extended pitching seminar. He begins by describing the theories of muscle development and exercises he learned from Gus Hoefling, the great Phillies trainer. "Before you build the house," Lee says, "you have to have the foundation. You can't pitch without a strong arm."

Lee then moves from theoretical to applied pitching, skipping the early lessons and getting right into how to throw breaking balls — curves, sliders, screwballs, forkballs. The arcane world of the pitcher, who can command the ball to do so many tricks, is fascinating to these baseball fanatics. Their questions are many and detailed. Lee embarks on a long discussion of the best ways to scuff or mark a ball (hint: the catcher or first baseman does it). He observes to an audience that understands the analogy that a scuffed ball "going up to the plate sounds just like Eartha Kitt's singing."

"Let me tell you what my favorite pitch is," Lee says inviting anticipation. "Not the jug-handled curve. Not the slow changeup. Not the inside fastball. My favorite pitch is a hard sinker that the hitter fouls off and drives into his foot or shin. I love it. The poor guy can hardly walk it hurts so much. He hops around on one foot, the trainer comes out with the cold stuff to numb the pain, to fix the boo-boo. The next day the guy comes out in a shin guard. I've got him. It's great. He'll never get another hit off me."

The last half of Lee's pitching seminar involves practical applications: the group of 20 pairs off and practices their breaking pitches with Lee commenting on grip, arm and wrist motion ("get that rotation now"), location, follow through, and so on. There's a lively dialogue as this exercise proceeds, and yes, Lee patiently answers why he chose to offer Tony Perez a slow curve in the famous sixth game of the '75 World Series (Perez, if you recall, deposited it in Medford): "It was the right pitch. In the wrong place. He was all set up for the slow curve. Don't throw high curve balls to good hitters — rule number one."

Lee's pitching staff this day reintroduces the notion that the curve ball really is an optical illusion.

In the afternoons, the workshop moves to the baseball diamonds at nearby Rhinebeck High School for a couple of pick-up games. On one field, Lee pitches for both nines. For three hours, he throws gopher balls and cracks jokes. On the other field, McKay organizes a nine-inning game with pitchers from the workshop. On both fields, the play is intense and joyful.

It's clear that the players have come to Omega not primarily for the formal instruction or to probe the depths of this complex game and its hold on American culture, but to experience the joy of solid contact, bat to ball (most eschew the aluminum bat), to slap some leather in the field, and to play some ball with kindred souls, in a setting where no harsh admonitions are exchanged, no alcohol, tobacco or other chemicals are consumed, and the the food is inedibly good for you.

Both Jeff McKay and Bill Lee, in the expression of Robert Frost, have made their avocation their vocation. The rhythm of their lives is to work enough to provide for their pleasures. For Lee, the pleasures are playing baseball games. He still loves to compete. For McKay, the pleasures involve a determined exploration of the natural world to reveal the inner self: Baseball as a way of knowing and being.

On the surface these men seem very much alike. Indeed, they resemble one another — big, fit men in their 40s, unmistakably athletic, natural, magnetic in their appeal. To the would-be and never-were athletes they instruct at Omega, Lee and McKay are paladins from the 1960s, former athletes who retain a robust masculinity and a humble willingness to share their physical gifts. Their speech is spiced with locker room language that comes naturally and offends no one: "This shit ain't easy," McKay tells his hitters, "but it is simple." Says Lee, "I'm a mean sunovabitch when I'm on the hill." The profanity is a part of the credential, the linguistic expertise of the ballplayer.

Both are quick to animate their instruction and anecdotes with physical gestures. McKay carries his Louisville Slugger as a talisman, swishing swings as he speaks, leaning against the bat, resting it on his shoulder in the timeless pose of the hitter. Lee is in constant, though deliberate, movement, now stretching his arm muscles, legs and back, bending and crouching, now pantomiming the motions of the pitcher, rocking back, following through.

It doesn't take long to notice differences as well. As he speaks, McKay implodes his words in a deep voice like the military officer he was in Vietnam. Though he smiles easily, and boasts a rumbling, cascading laugh, much in life to him is stone cold serious. He acknowledges that he is a searcher for those mysterious connections between the occult and intangible and the material.

At Omega, Lee's manner is more offhand and jocular. "Why not," his demeanor implies, "let's give it a try." His innermost thoughts remain his. He seems comfortable with his enduring reputation as baseball's merry prankster. He turns most conversations into occasions for a joke or a humorous monologue.

However, Lee, too, waxes philosophical when the situation suggests. "What is baseball," he asks during an impromptu seminar on the cut fastball, "but a means to an identity?" On another occasion, he acknowledges the appeal of baseball as a rite of spring: "It all goes back to the seed of Persephone," he says. Later, in a discussion about Don Zimmer (his old manager and nemesis) and gerbils and hamsters, he opines that "a manager's not a semanticist."

For McKay, earning his pay in the seminar is to have a good time, yes, but also to get through the program, to cover what they said they would cover. Also, to make sure the *meaning* of their play is properly addressed. Lee, on the other hand, sees that his role is to entertain, to keep 'em loose, and to pitch some batting practice so the mostly middle-aged players can go home saying they got a hit off a major league pitcher who struck out Reggie Jackson dozens of times.

At Omega, Lee wears a cap with Russian words in bright red Cyrillic letters; McKay wears a T-shirt with similar lettering. These are mementos of another baseball experience they have shared. In the spring of 1990, both men were drafted to join a group of Americans for a baseball trip to the Soviet Union, at that time in the midst of breaking apart. The shirt and the cap are gear of the "Moscow Red Devils" baseball team and commemorate an adventure both men describe as wonderful.

Lee was the requisite baseball celeb-

Hitting, McKay is fond of telling his students, isn't easy, but it is simple.

rity; McKay was part player, part spiritual envoy. "Bill was the czar of baseball and I was the czar of culture," McKay explains. "His job was to make the baseball part fun and mine was to make sure the non-baseball end went well. I had just had knee surgery so I was reduced to a little pinch-hitting in the games and not much else. I did some homework and planned excursions for the players and myself. It was an amazing time."

For Lee, the trip to Russia was a fascinating baseball and cultural experience. "It was a great group, about 25 men and one woman. We brought our own uniforms and played seven games. We had some decent players, mostly ex-fantasy campers and one ex-Triple A player, and had just a great time playing ball and seeing the place in a time of turmoil.

"We were there right at the pinnacle. All hell was breaking loose and I was playing baseball. Perfect. We had a big fight in our hotel over one of our players and a Russian girl. I said to the KGB guy, 'You've got a bad attitude. This country's changing and you better change too.' I think when all the Russians are playing baseball they'll be all right."

For McKay the trip became a time of great personal meaning, a healing of old wounds. "I knew from the outset that it would be a really emotional experience," he says. "I'm not sure why but as soon as we touched down in Russia, literally when the plane's wheels hit the tarmac, I started weeping. It all had to do with Vietnam. Here I was coming to Russia, landing in the enemy's camp.

"Early in the trip, the 'Czar of Culture' had planned a visit for the group to Gorky Park. When we got there I heard some loud angry young male voices that sure sounded familiar. Our interpreter, Igor, told me to stay away from those guys. But two of them, wearing Soviet Air Force officer's caps, came up to me out of the blue. I looked at them and said, 'Americanski ... Vietnamski.' And they said 'Sovietski ... Afghanzi.'

"We had about a dozen words in common, but we talked for a long time — the immediate communication of guys who had been to war. Igor finally helped us by translating our conversation. We talked about Vietnam and Afghanistan. One wanted to give me his journal of the war but I couldn't take it. Their openheartedness was very moving. One guy did give me his Air Force cap. What could I do? I gave him the Red Sox cap I was wearing.

"That wasn't the end of the story," McKay goes on. "The next summer, I'm in Alaska, in Sitka, the capitol of Russian America, visiting a Russian Orthodox Cathedral. I'm talking to the woman caretaker about my experience in Gorky Park the year before — and she points me to some Russians who are there in the church. One of them speaks some English so I tell the story to him. A big man stands up, another member of the group, and comes over and gives me a big hug and bellows, 'Afghanzi!' I tell you, this stuff helps."

While Bill Lee trades on his baseball past, he does not live there. One notices immediately that his anecdotes and stories, in public and in private, are almost always contemporary. His stories are about last week's game — or next week's. He glories in the play of his Springfield, Mass., team in last fall's senior baseball league championships in Arizona. "I had the time of my life! This team had never done anything out there and this year, we went to the finals," he says. "I won a couple of games, and hit two homers in the semifinal." One gets the sense Lee cares as much about his experience for the Moncton Mets or the Sydney Sooners in Canada's Maritimes after being waived out of Montreal in 1982 as he does for his many triumphs before packed houses in Fenway Park or Yankee Stadium.

How good a pitcher was Bill Lee? Very good indeed. He played on two national championship baseball teams at USC, then had a 14-year major league career, 10 of those years with the Red Sox. He won 17 games for the Red Sox three straight years (1973-75) and 16 in another season with Montreal. Perhaps most important, he was a Yankee killer. He compiled a .751 winning percentage against the New Yorkers, a team he contended "represented everything that was wrong with America," an evaluation that resonated throughout New England.

Clearly, Lee loved being a big league ballplayer, but more than anything he loves playing ball. His teammate Carl Yazstremski said of him, "You talk about a guy who would play baseball for nothing, no pay. This is the guy." Lee resembles the title character in Jerome Charyn's marvelous baseball novel, *The Seventh Babe*, who at the end of the novel, in his 70s, spirits an old teammate away from a nursing home to play on his barnstorming club. For his part, Lee says, "I honestly don't know how I want to be remembered. I just want to play till the day I die."

Bill Lee has been mythologized as the "Spaceman," a baseball star willing to confront the Establishment in the '60s and '70s and speak his mind regardless of the consequences. He was the subject of an article in a scholarly journal on "The Rebel Hero in Baseball"; rocker Warren Zevon offered a song titled "Bill Lee"; he has literally traveled the globe — China, Russia, Latin America — as a representative of baseball and his own brand of environmentalism and world harmony. He signs a copy of his book for a fellow Vermont transplant, "A Lefty from the Kingdom, Bill Lee, Earth '93."

For many young baseball fans in the

Continued on page 85

LEFTY AND THE VET

Continued from page 23

'60s and '70s, Lee was a model for their own experience and discontent. Visceral and outrageous, he defied baseball authorities; spoke out against the war in Vietnam; got busted by Commissioner Bowie Kuhn for his admitted use of marijuana and was fined $250 (he still keeps the letter from the commissioner taped to his refrigerator); resided deep in the doghouse of his Boston manager after the famous "gerbil" description ("I actually meant hamster," he says now), and twice left the squad on one-day personal strikes over the treatment of his teammates.

"Politically," he says, "I'm so far left that I'm a radical conservative. I'm Cartesian: 'I may not agree with what you say but I will defend with my life your right to say it.' As far as religion goes, I was raised a Roman Catholic so I know all about guilt. But I respect all religions and beliefs. I'm a Zen Buddhist. I'm a Rastafarian. I'm a Quechua Indian."

He paid a price, however, for his views and actions. He was banished from Boston with the other "Buffalo-heads," his friends on the team, in a trade in 1978 to Montreal for diamond immortal Stan Papi. Four years later, he was declared *persona non grata* on the Montreal team, released in the middle of the season. Not a single club in the majors could use a lefty who had a 2.93 ERA the year before and could "still throw strikes. I could play at that level. I had three or four more years easy. I had major league stuff. I proved it to myself at least in Moncton. It wasn't the big leagues, but they were great to me there and I was grateful to be playing."

Lee is sometimes presented as a "flake" whose startling opinions were listened to in the Vietnam era only because he had the sharp-breaking curve to back them up. It is not well known that he does have an academic training and context for his political and philosophical views. He earned an undergraduate degree in geography from USC and a studied for a masters in political geography at Southern Mississippi where his thesis was on the failure of American influence in Southeast Asia.

For Bill Lee, the Vietnam War itself was a "close call ... In 1969, even though I had a wife and a young child, I got my draft notice. I took the physical. I think my lottery number was 36. I was toast. Then I called the Red Sox. They flew me to Boston and the next day I enlisted in the Army Reserves. The moral of the story is if you are lefthanded and can throw strikes, you don't go to 'Nam.

"It seemed like the whole team was in the Reserves: Lonborg, Lyle, the Conigliaro Brothers. I was a clerk-typist. I was lucky. Mostly my duty was to go into South Boston in my Army uniform and get the donuts.

"Yeah, I feel some guilt. My teammate Bill Campbell had to walk the point in an infantry platoon in Vietnam. He was lucky, too; he came back alive. Sport is basically an extension of the militarism of society. That's why they play the National Anthem before games. Beyond being conservative and aristocratic and distant, the Red Sox had no political consciousness. My job during Vietnam was to kill the Yankees of New York, kill the Indians of Cleveland.

"In many ways," Bill Lee says, "we're still fighting that war. The '60s were a revolutionary time. The '80s was all reactionary backlash. Maybe the '90s will be better."

Jeff McKay's view of Vietnam is more immediate and wrenching. "Vietnam tore up a lot of lives, mine included," he says of the experience of his generation. "It changed my whole life. My personal experience in 'Nam was not as bad as some, but I sure had my eyes opened. Before Vietnam I was headed down the narrow path."

That "narrow path" was his lockstep

progression from Scarsdale High School to Middlebury College where he played sports (football quarterback, baseball catcher), enjoyed the fraternity experience, dated and then married a beautiful and brilliant Middlebury woman. His future held the prospect of a professional life in business or education — "but Vietnam blew that all up."

Like so many of his schoolmates, McKay participated in Army ROTC at Middlebury and was commissioned a second lieutenant upon graduation. After infantry officers basic training, he had orders for Germany. "I did a dumb thing," he says. "I volunteered for paratroopers' school. Then one day, I was told, 'Fall out, your orders have been changed. And don't bother with cold weather clothing.' I was handed a ticket to Vietnam.

"I had also been able to attend defense information school at Fort Bragg. That was very lucky because when I got to 'Nam, though I was an infantry platoon leader, I was assigned to information services for the 173rd Airborne Brigade.

"I saw a lot in Vietnam. It changed my whole life and the way I looked at things. I remember so much pain, but I remember strength, too."

Like so many of his contemporaries, McKay came home from Vietnam to find that the old values and assumptions didn't work. He had fundamentally changed. His marriage fell apart early and his first jobs back from Vietnam (as a teacher at the Millbrook School for Boys in New York and at California Lutheran College as a baseball and football coach and admissions counselor) didn't satisfy him. "Basically," he says now, "I was in my 'post-Vietnam zombie phase' and these small conservative schools and I were not good matches, to say the least."

Subsequent years saw McKay learning the skills and theories that he now practices as (in the words of a former Omega workshop participant) a "coach, teacher, sport psychologist and pioneer in the 'Spirit of Sport.' " His journey has taken him back and forth across the country many times, in many roles, so that he now lives in the world, trying to make a living by making a difference, making conventional education unconventional, using sport and play as vehicles for coming together and sharing, encouraging always a respect for nature as the metaphor for the interconnectedness of all endeavor.

In the early '70s, he got himself to Berkeley "to do the Berkeley thing," and earned a degree in journalism. "That was an important time for me," he says now. As the freshman baseball coach at Cal in the highly competitive PAC 10, "I learned that the 'old ways' were not for me. I experimented with empowering athletes and had some success getting athletes away from dependence on an authoritarian model into some independence of thought and action."

At the Esalen Sports Center in California, McKay heard about exciting things in athletic education at the University of Massachusetts, so he headed east again for a four-year stint in western Massachusetts, taking courses and coaching baseball in another big-time program, earning a masters in education this time, becoming more convinced than ever that the competitive sporting environment could be a classroom for real growth and learning.

McKay then made an important connection with Outward Bound as a leader in their program in Colorado. After a couple of years in Colorado, he "packed it up and came out here to San Francisco" and spent the next six years in his "New Games phase," traveling the country as a trainer for the New Games Foundation. New Games represented an approach to play that emphasized cooperative effort and fun, rather than overheated competition and hostility.

"I loved that stuff, especially early on," says McKay. "New Games was teaching that competition could be healthy. Our games and training taught those who were aggressive to channel that aggressiveness — and taught assertiveness to those who may have been overly passive. The rule was 'play hard, play fair, no one hurt.' The 'play hard' has always been important to me."

Since 1986, McKay has been an "independent consultant," as he puts it, working "the fringes of education," employing his own distillation of the models of Outward Bound, New Games, and conventional athletic competition. "The corporate work pays the bills," he says. "Sometimes I take managers to a course; sometimes I take the course to the managers. The intent is always to teach people to manage themselves through physical activities which require teamwork, challenge, healthy competition and creativity."

He has conducted similar programs for different constituencies, closer to his heart. An example is his work with difficult kids for the city of Oakland, working with the schools, courts and the probation office. "I even have taken Indian kids out on Outward Bound-type trips to the wilderness to get back in touch with part of their heritage. Can you imagine that?"

One of his favorite jobs has been his four-year tenure as coach of the Western Washington University baseball team, an hour's drive from Vancouver. "This is 100 percent volunteer," he says. "They can't afford a coach, but I love it. I go up there for two weeks each spring and teach them as much as I can. It's a good life. I live in a cabin on a lake. I have really come to enjoy the Pacific Northwest. They pay me in smoked salmon and each year give me a new baseball cap."

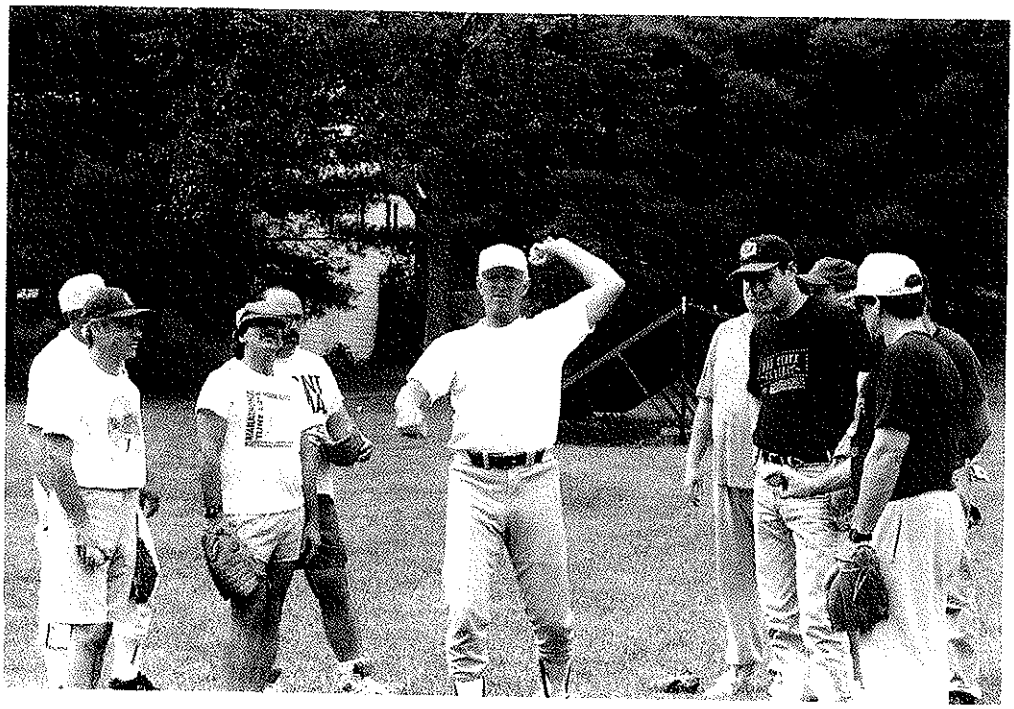
One of the fringe benefits of this job is that he gets to indulge an evolving appreciation for Northwest coastal Indian art. "I have some free time and I explore the museums and galleries in the Vancouver area. I don't have a lot of money to spend, but I have a half dozen pieces I like."

Like his trip to Russia, McKay's 25th Middlebury reunion was an important time. "It was hard for me to come back," he says. "I had really run away from my history — high school, college, ROTC, Vietnam. There were a lot of things about myself at Middlebury that in retrospect I didn't like. About 10 years before, I had come back to Middlebury, but like a Ninja — low profile, semi-clandestine, solo. But the 25th was a public experience of healing. It was wonderful to see old friends and hear their stories."

The present for Jeff McKay is a startling return to orthodoxy: "I actually have a real job. In an office!" He is directing the Redwood Program at Stanford University (Recreational Education Development Workshop Out-Of-Doors), a half-time position in Student Activities funded for two years by the Stanford Student Association. Redwood is a program for prospective leaders involving trips and activities to wilderness areas in the West.

"This is the kind of job I've wanted to try for a long time," McKay reveals. "I needed a change. I had been logging a lot of frequent flyer miles. But I tell you it has been a real adjustment for me. My skills are more, shall we say, 'hands-on' than administrative. They weren't real impressed at Stanford when I showed up with no computer skills whatever. And the students — they're so intense. I tell them, 'You're into Stanford, relax,' but they're all worried about Harvard Business School. Type A all the way."

In the near term, McKay will work at Stanford. "And I'll still do the corporate leadership work, and of course, Omega with Bill — that's become a minor 'institution' now. I'll always love teaching baseball as an endeavor of the spirit."



Bill Lee shares some of his pitching secrets with a receptive audience.

Continued from previous page

Once again this year, he spent two weeks with his Western Washington charges and found time also to work at Amherst College with Bill Thurston, the long-time coach there, "a master technician," according to McKay. "I've wanted to spend some time with him ever since I left the Amherst area."

"To be honest, I think I've come full circle," he says, contemplating the next stage. "I'd love to take all I've done and learned and coach at the small college level. I think I may be ready for that now."

For Bill Lee, the present offers the prospect that he might actually get his wish and be able to play baseball till he drops. His mind is awash with plans and projects that will keep him in uniform.

Lee practices his own version of the "endless summer": playing and coaching locally in Vermont in the spring, "barnstorming" with the Grey Sox in the summer, heading to Arizona for some senior league hardball in the fall, and sampling the Florida winter at the fantasy camps of the Red Sox and the Expos. This year was his first at the Expo camp; when he saw the Expo brochure listing the former stars who would be involved, Lee was shocked. "These guys all hate me," he says. "Even (former manager) Fanning is there. Oh, well ..."

His chief project is to parlay his smash hit of the summer of '92, the New England Grey Sox, into another, even more successful second season. The Grey Sox are a collection of Bill Lee's baseball buddies from the Red Sox (Dalton Jones, Bill Buckner, Dave Stapleton, Bernie Carbo, Ferguson Jenkins, among others) and ringers from other teams (George Foster, Tug McGraw, Ozzie Virgil Jr.), all refugees of the ill-fated, and ill-financed, Florida Senior League of a couple of years ago. Lee is listed as part owner/general manager/player-coach of the Grey Sox.

Last summer, the Grey Sox experimented with an old fashioned barnstorming tour of nine New England cities. They sold out every park and won all nine games, behind Stanley's pitching (16 innings, one run) and Foster's still booming bat (in Burlington he won the home run contest by slugging seven of 10 pitches over the left field fence at Centennial Field). That these graybeards handled the cream of the New England Division I college baseball crop was loudly appreciated by their aging baby-boomer followers. It may be that Lee is on to something here.

This summer, the Grey Sox will be based in Nashua, N.H., where they will play a dozen games, six from a base in Nashua, N.H., and six more in Bangor, Burlington, Moncton, Taunton, Holyoke and Albany. Forty-six year old Bill Lee will be playing a lot of baseball this summer.

He also looks forward to his return in August to Omega, this year for a doubleheader. The week before his Labor Day session with Jeff McKay, Lee is conducting a workshop on baseball for women, building on the interest generated by the film, *A League of Their Own*. The workshop will feature Lee's Aunt Annabelle "Lefty" Lee, a star pitcher in the Women's Semi-Pro Hardball League in Chicago in the '40s and '50s.

"She pitched the first perfect game in that league and had a lifetime ERA of 1.17," Lee says. "That was her idea of the Equal Rights Amendment. Any man who did not consider her an equal could try hitting against her. At Omega, she's the baseball star; I get to be Jeff McKay."

Could Bill Lee get a "real job" like Jeff McKay's half-time gig at Stanford? "Probably not," Lee allows. "There would have to be big conditions and concessions on both sides. I'll tell you the job I should have, though — pitching coach for the Colorado Rockies. With the light air out there, they need a sinker ball specialist, someone who could teach the kids to keep the ball down. Like me, or maybe Fergy Jenkins. Tall guys who threw strikes."

It's interesting to watch the negotiation of middle-age by Jeff McKay and Bill Lee. McKay, the Easterner turned Californian, continues the healing process two and a half decades after Vietnam and Middlebury, and contemplates coming this way and perhaps a future in schools. Lee, a Californian who admits to itchy feet and believes he "lives too much in the future," surveys the future (and Craftsbury Common on the next hill over) from the lovely new home in Vermont that he and his wife Pam have built on land they bought from a Red Sox fantasy camper five years ago. Last year it was the Yukon; now Lee thinks he might live on the islands a half hour off Vancouver: "The air there has been filtered only by the Pacific Ocean."

Bill Lee and Jeff McKay, sharing the bond of baseball, are two men who acknowledge some sacrifices and mistakes in their journey, but few compromises, and still in 1993 manage to ward off disillusionment and live life with some enthusiasm for the enterprise.

Karl Lindholm '67 is the dean of off-campus study and an assistant professor of American literature and civilzation at Middlebury. He taught a class last year in the First-Year Seminar Program on "Baseball, Literature and American Culture." He was a battery-mate of Jeff McKay '65 on the Middlebury College baseball team — and is still mad at Don Zimmer for not pitching Bill Lee against the Yankees during a four-games series in August of '78.