

HERE COMES THE STRIKEOUT

BY LEONARD KESSLER

In the spring the birds sing. The grass is green.

Boys and girls run to play BASEBALL.

Bobby plays baseball too. He can run the bases fast. He can slide. He can catch the ball. But he cannot hit the ball. He has never hit the ball.

"Twenty times at bat and twenty strikeouts," said Bobby.

"I am in a bad slump."

"Next time try my good-luck bat," said Willie.

"Thank you," said Bobby. "I hope it will help me get a hit."

"Boo, Bobby," yelled the other team. "Easy out. Easy out. Here comes the strikeout." "He can't hit." "Give him the fast ball."

Bobby stood at home plate and waited. The first pitch was a fast ball.

"Strike one."

The next pitch was slow. Bobby swung hard, but he missed.

"Strike two."

"Boo!" Strike him out!"

"I will hit it this time," said Bobby.

He stepped out of the batter's box. He tapped the lucky bat on the ground. He stepped back into the batter's box. He waited for the pitch. It was fast ball right over the plate. Bobby swung.

"STRIKE THREE! You are OUT!"

The game was over. Bobby's team had lost the game.

"I did it again," said Bobby. "Twenty -one time at bat. Twenty-one strikeouts. Take back your lucky bat, Willie. It was not lucky for me."

It was not a good day for Bobby. He had missed two fly balls. One dropped out of his glove. And one went over his head. He had struck out three times. And his team has lost the game. He walked home alone.

"How was the game?" asked his mother.

"Oh it was fine," said Bobby.

"Time for a nice hot bath," said his mother.

Bobby went to take his bath. He sat in the tub.

He was not happy.

"Twenty-one time at bat. Twenty-one strikeouts," he said.

And then he began to cry.

"Are you all right in there?" called his mother.

"I am fine," cried Bobby.

"Then why are you crying?" asked his mother.

"I am not crying," said Bobby.

"What is the matter, then?" asked his mother.

"Oh every time I play baseball, all I do is strike out. No one wants me on the team. They even choose the little kids before they choose me.

They always choose me last." He sobbed again.

"I wish I were a good hitter."

"You can be a good hitter," said his mother. "You are a good swimmer. You are a good runner. You must work until you are a good hitter."

"Maybe Willie will help me. He is a good hitter. I will ask him" said Bobby.

"Good," said his mother. "And one more thing.

Did you wash your face and your ears?"

The next day Bobby went to see Willie.

"Sure I will help you with your hitting," said Willie. But you must work hard every day. Lucky helmet won't do it. Lucky bats won't do it.

Only hard work will do it."

"I will work hard," said Bobby. I want to be a good hitter."

"First we must choose a bat for you. We will choose one that is not too heavy, not too light, not too long, but just right. "First you hold the bat this way, keep your feet this way, and you swing the bat this way, see. Now try it."

He swung so hard that he fell down.

"Strike one," said Willie. Let's try again. But swing easy,"

Willie pitched the ball again. Bobby swung. And this time he hit ball!

He did not hit it very far, but he hit the ball.

"Good hit," said Willie. "You hit it. You did it."

"I HIT THE BALL. I HIT THE BALL," shouted Bobby.

"I CAN DO IT. I CAN GET A HIT!" He jumped up and down.

"Let's try it again," said Willie.

And that is what they did all that day, and the next day, and the next. Some days Bobby worked with Willie. Some days he worked alone. Some days he did better. Some days he did not do so well. There were good days. There were bad days. But he kept working and trying.

"I hope I get a hit in a game," said Bobby.<

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"You can hit the ball," said Willie. "You will get a hit in a game."

The next day was a big game. Bobby's team was the Bobcats. The other team was the Sluggers.

The first time Bobby came to bat, he did everything Willie had told him. He was ready! The pitch was a strike. On the next pitch Bobby swung. And he hit the ball. It was a little pop fly to the shortstop. Bobby was out.

"But I hit it," said Bobby. "I will do better next time."

At the bottom of the fourth inning the score was Sluggers: Three runs Bobcats: Three runs. Then Willie came up to bat. He hit a long drive to center field.

"Home run, home run!" yelled his team. But a little dog ran off with the ball. They had to stop

the game and chase the dog to get the baseball back. Then both teams had to rest from all that running. It was a long inning.

In the last inning the score was still Sluggers:

Three runs Bobcats: Three runs.

It was the last time at bat for the Bobcats.

There were two outs. There was a runner on third base. And who was up at bat? It was Bobby.

"Look who is up," yelled the Sluggers. "HERE COMES THE STRIKEOUT!" "Move in close. He can't hit it." "Strike him out.

Bobby held the bat. "I can do it," he said softly. He swung and missed.

"Strike one,"

"Move in closer," shouted the shortstop. "He was lucky the last time up. He can't hit it again."

Bobby swung.

"Strike two."

"One more strike and he is out." The shortstop laughed.

Willie walked up to the plate.

< FONT face=Calibri>"Get a hit, Bobby. Just meet the ball," said Willie. "You can do it!"

The pitcher looked over at the runner on third base. He looked at Bobby. And now he was ready. The pitch came in fast. Bobby swung his bat.

CRACK.

POW.

Up -----up. Up went the ball over the head of the shortstop

and dropped on the grass. It was a base hit.

"Run, Bobby. Run to first base!" yelled Willie.

Bobby just stood there.

"Run! Run!" the Bobcats screamed.

Bobby started to run. He ran fast.

"Safe!"

The runner on third base had crossed home plate with the winning run. The game was over. The Bobcats had won.

"Good hit, Bobby," said Willie.

"Good hit," said the other Bobcats.

"Twenty-three times at bat. Twenty-one strikeouts, one pop fly, and ONE HIT."

Bobby smiled at Willie.

When he came home his mother asked, "How was the game?"

Bobby smiled. "I got a hit. We won the game."

"Wonderful!" said his mother.

Now when Bobby plays baseball, sometimes he strikes out. But most times he hits the ball.

"How do you do it?" asked Matt.

"A lucky bat?" asked Sally.

"No," said Bobby.

"Lucky bats won't do it. Lucky helmets won't do it. Only hard work will do it."

Bobby looked at Willie and they laughed.