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Infallible

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Bob De Smith

I had never seen my dad play ball.
Sure, we played catch—
Strangely, more often in our grandmother's
Backyard than home.
I guess at home there were other jobs to do.
His mitt was a relic—
Dark leather, something like a first-baseman's mitt:
Flat, awkward, with failing laces.
We laughed, my brother and I,
Who would spend time at the hardware store
(The only game in town) trying on gloves,
Wondering how such a contraption could stop anything—
Until we learned he was
A softball, fastpitch catcher.
Squatting for doubleheaders,
He said, turning to myth before us,
His palm would swell double-sized
At the receiving end of a wheelhouse pitcher.
Snap! Crackle!
But I never saw him play,
Until a church old-fashioned picnic,
A father-and-son game.
I saw this from the overfilled outfield
(Everyone plays—it's church night)
Positioned where
Least likely to be needed as a fielder.
First off, he batted left—from my side of the plate—
Though he's a righty in all other respects
(Okay, except for being a left-foot braker, but that's another story).
Asked later, he explained,
In what must have been a well-rehearsed line
Fished up from a decade back,
“Well, I figure I hit from the right side of the plate.”

Okay, but the man could hit.
He took a couple of pitches
(Come on, Dad, get this over with)
and then—WHAM—
A nifty little rope right over
The first baseman's head.
No need to hurry to first.
If you think—as I did—
The hit was a fluke,
He reproduced its
Identical twin his next at bat.
“Hey, your dad can hit,”
Said the taller, older first right fielder,
As he tried to pick the old man off at first
(Fat chance).
I let that sink in.