



## FAMILY TIES

DDD Today recently introduced a new, occasional feature called "FAMILY TIES," which presents personal stories from division employees, honoring their own family members or close friends who have/had a developmental disability.

**Today's Quote:** *"Baseball is 90 percent mental, the other half is physical."*  
Lawrence Peter "Yogi" Berra, 1925 - , American Baseball Player, Catcher

### My friend Louie By Roger Puente - DDD, Chief of Staff

When I was a small boy about the age of seven, I loved baseball. I played or watched baseball whenever I could. I considered myself fortunate to have a friend like Louie to teach me the game. We would play baseball in a ball field behind my home every day during the summer until sunset.

Those sunsets were magnificent and the image of them remains vivid in my memory to this day. I have always looked back on those days as the happiest days of my childhood.

My friend Louie was a unique individual. Louie was my father's cousin and twenty years my senior. However, to me Louie was just one of the guys, perhaps a little bigger, but one of the guys none the less. I was told that Louie was mentally retarded and that his right arm was afflicted by cerebral palsy. None of this really mattered because Louie was a very good ball player, and he was my friend.

Louie's range of motion in his right arm was severely limited; it was essentially always held at a right angle. However, that did not deter him from using that arm to whatever extent possible. He would use that arm to toss a ball in the air



and hit it with a bat held in his left hand. Now you may think that a baseball player using just one arm to swing a bat could not be very good. You would be wrong. Louie had tremendous power in that arm. Once when I had the great fortune to go to Yankee Stadium to see my first

professional baseball game, I could not help but study the size of the ballpark. I quickly concluded that Louie could hit a ball out of the stadium with just one arm, and why not? He could hit a ball out of our ballpark and across Highway 35 in Woodbridge, New Jersey without any difficulty. Fortunately, no one's car was ever seriously damaged, though occasionally

a ball bouncing off the roof of a car would startle the driver.

I could recall standing out in left field waiting for Louie to hit that ball and when he did, it would travel to the heavens. I would watch the trajectory of the ball and reach a height where I could no longer see it. I would count 1/1000, 2/1000 and by the time I said 4/1000 the ball would

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## My friend Louie *(continued from page 1)*

return to my field of vision. For a young boy to be able to catch such a hit was to me the ultimate achievement. Nothing, and I mean nothing, could give me greater satisfaction, because Louie was the best ballplayer I knew. To be able to field his hits meant that I could play well.

Unfortunately, those summers went quickly, and little boys grow up. As the years passed, and I started playing in organized baseball leagues, Louie and I played ball less often. Though I had some wonderful times playing on a team, I would think of Louie often and wish I were playing with him. There was a pure joy in playing with Louie, for there was no competition for a spot on a team or concern about one's batting average. There were no unruly parents sitting in the stadium hurling insults at the umpire. There was only the joy of baseball shared between friends.

Though Louie and I played baseball less and less as the years went by, whenever I could get time away from my college courses, we occasionally got together to play horseshoes. Louie was also the best horseshoe player I knew.

I foolishly concluded at the age of twenty that I was now the better athlete. I regularly weight-lifted and ran long distance and I was proud of my physical abilities. However, Louie always won in a game of horseshoes, no matter how hard I tried. I have not seen Louie in over twenty-five years, though I suspect whatever game he is playing he is still the best.



## Spring Training II



### 1. **COSAC The New Jersey Center for Outreach and Services for the Autism Community (COSAC)**

#### ***Parent Workshops in English and Spanish***

- Tuesday, April 29th, 6:00 - 9:00pm Essex County – 100 Valley Way, West Orange, NJ

#### ***Spanish Autism Series***

- May 8th and June 12th, 6:00 - 9:00 p.m. Hudson County – the Arc of Hudson County, 405 - 409 – 36th Street, Union City, NJ 07087



### 2. Co-Sponsored by



#### ***Share Living Options***

- Tuesday, June 17th, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

### 3. **Life Line for the Journey**

The session for April 14, 2008 has been rescheduled for Tuesday, June 10, 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Please see the website for details: <http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/ddd/lifeline.htm>