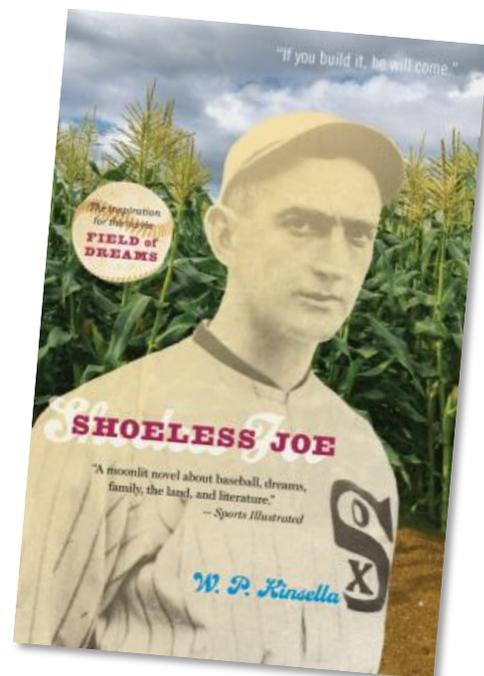


Shoeless Joe

by Joe Kinsella



BOOK DISCUSSION RESOURCES



About the Author

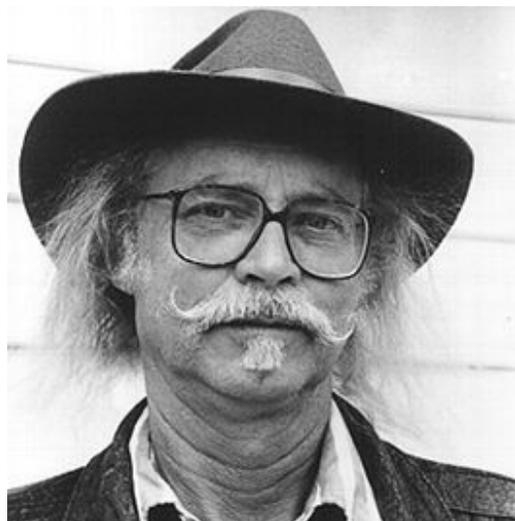
W. P. "Bill" Kinsella was a legendary fiction writer, best known for his award-winning novel *Shoeless Joe*, which took on a new life as the movie *Field of Dreams*. The author's inspirational words, which defined the novel and the film—"If you build it, they will come," "Go the distance," and even "Field of dreams"—have taken their place in literature's lexicon of ideas. Ironically, Kinsella had originally called the novel *Dream Field*, a choice which was overruled by his editor of the day.

In addition to *Shoeless Joe*, a romantic, magic realism baseball novel, Bill wrote other fiction in that genre, such as *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy*, *Magic Time*, *If Wishes Were Horses*, and *Butterfly Winter*.

Bill Kinsella also wrote numerous baseball short story collections, the fictional Hobbema Indian Reserve stories, and two rollicking, rambling fictional accounts of life during the Great Depression on the prairies (*Box Socials* and *The Winter Helen Dropped By*) which involve a little bit of baseball and a whole lot of fun. "Lieberman in Love", a short story from the book *Red Wolf, Red Wolf*, was adapted for film, which won an Oscar for Best Live Action Short Film at the 1996 Academy Awards.

He also wrote two collections of poetry, three baseball plays, and several works of non-fiction, including an account of the career of baseball's Ichiro Suzuki, published only in Japanese, and a biography of Cree painter Allan Sapp, of whom Bill was an early collector and admirer.

William Patrick Kinsella was born in Edmonton, Alberta, in 1935. Though he had been writing since he was a child, winning a YMCA contest at age fourteen, he began taking writing courses at the University of Victoria in



1970, receiving his bachelor of arts in creative writing in 1974. In 1978 he earned a master of fine arts in English through the Iowa Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa. Before becoming a professional author, he was a professor of English at the University of Calgary.

Shoeless Joe won the Canadian Authors Association Prize, the Alberta Achievement Award, the Books in Canada First Novel Award, and the Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship. Bill won the Leacock Award in 1987 and in 1993 was made an Officer of the Order of Canada. In 2005, he was awarded the Order of British Columbia, and in 2009, he was awarded the George Woodcock Lifetime Achievement Award. Kinsella was presented with honorary degrees from Laurentian University, University of Victoria, and the Open Learning Institute.

For more information on W.P. Kinsella, visit <http://www.wpkinsella.com>

Author Interview

From ESPN.com:

http://www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/10797026/mlb-wp-kinsella-25th-anniversary-field-dreams

Where it began: 'Shoeless Joe'

by **W.P. Kinsella**, April 21, 2014

The book came first. Actually, the story came first. I wrote a 20-page short story that eventually became Chapter 1 of my novel "Shoeless Joe." The story was published in an anthology, and a young editor at the publishing house Houghton Mifflin in Boston, Larry Kessenich, read not the story but a review of the anthology in Publishers Weekly. On the strength of that, he wrote to me at Desolate U. in Alberta, where I was teaching bonehead English, to suggest that if the story was part of a novel, he wanted to see it, and if it wasn't, it should be.

I wrote back to say I would need guidance, as I had published four collections of short stories but had never written a publishable novel. We worked well together, and "Shoeless Joe" was just like a baby -- it took nine months. I wrote it under the title "The Kidnapping of J.D. Salinger." Houghton Mifflin chose the title "Shoeless Joe," though they considered "Dreamfield." When finished, it was awarded the Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship and was published in 1982.

W.P. Kinsella's novel, "Shoeless Joe," won the Canadian Authors Association Prize, the Alberta Achievement Award, the Books in Canada First Novel Award, and the Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship. Courtesy of W.P. Kinsella

"Shoeless Joe" was optioned by a small independent movie company that kept it in development for two years before the option expired. Paramount Pictures then optioned it and hired Phil Alden Robinson to write the screenplay. Phil was absolutely in love with my book and kept in touch all through the adaptation -- though I had no input, nor would I have wanted any. Phil explained that there was no way to fit a 300-page novel into an hour-and-40-minute movie. He explained that marvelous characters like Eddie Scissions had to be cut, and that time had to be telescoped in many sequences.

I replied that to me, writing a novel was akin to a baker baking a loaf of bread: So long as the buyers pay for the bread, they were free to do with it as they chose. If they made dainty sandwiches, fine. If they fed it to their gerbils, fine. I realized that most books optioned for movies became gerbil food. I've never understood authors who are proprietary with their work, fighting any changes of plot or character. All I care about is being properly paid.

"Field of Dreams" was a stunning exception. I wept when I read the finished screenplay. "This is my own work doing this to me," I said. "How can this happen?"

When Paramount read the script, it said, "This is a wonderful script. However, it is a SMALL movie, and this year we are not making small movies."

A disappointed Phil Robinson asked, and was granted permission, to shop the screenplay to other studios.

Eventually, Universal Studios took over the option.

Robinson and his associates accepted a lower budget in return for Phil being hired to direct the movie, something he felt was essential to protect the integrity of the script. Even so, he had his battles. Studio executives, when they read the ending, loved the idea of father and son playing catch so much that they insisted on moving it forward and have father and son travel across America together, searching for writer Terence Mann and Moonlight Graham. Phil was appalled and stood his ground, pointing out that it would nullify the sweet surprise of the father's resurrection. Executives reluctantly conceded the point.

In the novel, the reclusive writer was the real-life J.D. Salinger. Why was he not a character in the movie? The answer involves both moxie and cowardice. Houghton Mifflin had their lawyers analyze the manuscript word by word. The lawyers said to the effect that "the only thing Salinger could sue for was under a little-known definition of libel called 'false light.'" They went on to say that in order to advance his case, he would have to appear in court in person, something he definitely would not want, and he would have to say: "I have been portrayed in this novel as a kindly, loving, humorous individual. In reality, I am a surly son of a bitch who lives in a bunker on the side of a hill and shoots at tourists when they drive by my house. Therefore, I have been portrayed in a false light."

Now, 25 years later, it's difficult to imagine anyone other than Kevin Costner playing Ray Kinsella. Getty Images

Houghton Mifflin's lawyers did receive a grumbling letter from Salinger's lawyers stating that he was outraged and offended to appear in the novel and would be very unhappy if it were transferred to other media. They didn't say that he would do anything, just that he would be unhappy.

The cowardice involved was that studio executives were afraid Salinger would launch a nuisance lawsuit just as the movie was being released, and it would cost them time and a lot of publicity money to get rid of it. The moxie appeared when the executives pointed out that on a good opening weekend, the movie would be seen by 10 times the number of people who had read the book. The change would be noticed by only the literate few, people who are not valued by movie executives.

For once, the movie people were right. Over the years, most people I have met have no idea that J.D. Salinger was the original reclusive author. Also, many who read the novel have no idea that Salinger was a real person, not my fictional creation.

Why Ray Kinsella? The choice of name for my protagonist had little to do with me personally, and everything to do with Salinger. While researching the novel, I found that Salinger had used two characters named Kinsella in his fiction: Richard Kinsella, an annoying classmate in "The Catcher In the Rye," and Ray Kinsella, in the short story "A Young Girl in 1941 With No Waist at All," originally published in Mademoiselle magazine. I decided to name my character Ray Kinsella so he could turn up on Salinger's doorstep and say, "I'm one of your fictional creations come to life, here to take you to a baseball game."

After scouting locations from New Mexico to Ontario, the movie was filmed near Dyersville, Iowa, primarily on Don Lansing's farm. The movie site has become a major tourist attraction in Eastern Iowa. The Lansings have recently sold to a conglomerate, with ex-baseball great Wade Boggs as an investor.

I spent a few days on the movie set. I am a person who stays in the background and observes, so few of the cast or crew knew I was there. Making movies requires tons of patience, which I don't have. The endless setups, the persnickety lighting, the repetitive retakes are not something I can tolerate. My theory of movie-making is you get two chances. If you screw up the first take, then you'd better get it right the second time. I'd always come in under budget if nothing else.

I was present for the filming of the feed store scene, shot at an actual store in Dyersville. I sat just out of range of the cameras, finally was tired and completely bored after about eight takes, and went back to our motel. My wife and I were part of the audience at the PTA scene. We were trapped there for a full day of sweltering retakes, and we never appeared in the final cut.

I met Kevin Costner and Amy Madigan, and Gaby Hoffmann, who played their daughter. The most interesting person I met and spent time with on the set was Hoffmann's mother, Viva, the former Andy Warhol movie star of the 1960's. She was a charming, articulate woman who was also a writer and painter of note.

When we were informed the movie was going ahead, we, of course, talked casting. We were informed they were recruiting Kevin Costner. I had never heard of Costner, so my choice for Ray Kinsella was Bo Svenson, who I thought looked a little like me and the imaginary Ray, and whose work I had admired in "Walking Tall." I rented "No Way Out" and agreed that Kevin would be perfect for the part. James Earl Jones was the obvious choice for Terence Mann, and I was delighted when he was available.

I am told that the Voice that speaks to Ray in the cornfield was, though not credited, Ed Harris, Amy Madigan's husband.

I loved the movie. Novels and movies are entirely different art forms. I don't see how Phil Robinson could have done a better job of successfully transferring one to the other.

How have things changed in the past 25 years since the release of the movie? Fathers and sons still bond playing catch, still attend baseball games together, still share warm and luminous memories of games and players gone but not forgotten.

I have received letters from every part of the world, mainly from younger men, about how the ending of the movie affected them. Moved by those final scenes, men traveled, often thousands of miles, to take their fathers to baseball games, or just to have a catch in the backyard.

When the movie went into wide release and came to my then-hometown of White Rock, British Columbia, I set up a table in the lobby of the local theater to sell books as the crowd exited. But before that, each evening, I stood at the back of the theater as Kevin Costner and Dwier Brown, Ray and John Kinsella, played catch; and as I did, I came to realize the absolute power of the great movie that Phil Robinson had created. For every night, one could hear the sniffing and snuffling of the audience, and the unabashed and unashamed tears that flowed as the universality of the father-son dynamic touched even the most indifferent hearts. I realized that my writing coupled with Phil Robinson's genius had made that happen.

Still, after 25 years, the saga that began with my recalling my own father's recollections of a disgraced baseball player undeserving of his fate, is not over; "Field of Dreams" the musical, is out there in the cosmos, ethereal as Brigadoon, lurking, waiting patiently, being groomed for the stages of the world.

In addition to "Shoeless Joe," a romantic, magic realism baseball novel, W.P. "Bill" Kinsella has written other fiction in that genre: "The Iowa Baseball Confederacy," "Magic Time," "If Wishes Were Horses" and "Butterfly Winter." He has written numerous baseball short-story collections, the fictional Hobbema Indian Reserve stories and two rollicking, rambling fictional accounts of life during the Great Depression on the prairies ("Box Socials" and "The Winter Helen Dropped By"). He has also written two collections of poetry, three baseball plays and several works of nonfiction, including an account of the career of baseball's Ichiro Suzuki, published only in Japanese, and a biography of Cree painter Allan Sapp, of whom Bill was an early collector and admirer.

Kinsella did an interview with Rob Darnell that is also a good read: <https://robdarnell.com/2015/08/21/an-interview-with-w-p-kinsella/>

A Critical Review

From : *The New York Times*

<https://www.nytimes.com/1982/07/25/books/imaginary-baseball.html>

IMAGINARY BASEBALL

By DANIEL OKRENT July 25, 1982

W.P. KINSELLA was born for fiction, or at least for this book. "Shoeless Joe" concerns a moonstruck man named Ray Kinsella (Should we presume a kinship between author and protagonist? You bet we should) who hears voices and heeds what they say. First, Ray builds a ball park on a few acres of his Iowa corn farm and populates it in his mind with the disgraced heroes of the 1919 Black Sox, most notably Shoeless Joe Jackson. Then a voice tells him to "ease his pain," and Ray takes this to mean that he should go find J.D. Salinger in his New Hampshire hermitage and take him to a ball game. This accomplished - at what appears to Salinger to be gunpoint - the farmer and the writer begin to hear voices together, and they set off, wary partners at first, co-conspirators as the book progresses, to unpeel a few layers of the game's lure and charm.

Mr. Kinsella is drunk on complementary elixirs, literature and baseball, and the cocktail he mixes of the two is a lyrical, seductive and altogether winning concoction. It's a love story, really the love his characters have for the game becoming manifest in the trips they make through time and space and ether. He invents a life for a long-dead player named Moonlight Graham who played half an inning for the New York Giants in 1905. Graham appears in the book, wholly in the present, as a kindly old doctor in a Minnesota town near the Canadian border and as a freckled youngster taking the field with Jackson and the Black Sox on Ray's farm. Kinsella also lavishes his pleasure on Eddie "Kid" Scissons, a creaking, ancient Iowa gent who has passed himself off for years as "the oldest living Chicago Cub." When Ray discovers the Kid's story is a fabrication, an elaborate patch on an anonymous career in the lower minors, he is at first angry. Then, he says, "I imagine Eddie Scissons has decided, 'If I can't have what I want most in life, then I'll pretend I had it in the past, and talk about it and live it and relive it until it is real and solid and I can hold it to my heart like a precious child. Once I've experienced it so completely, no one can ever take it away from me.' "

Nice words, and the last sentence is an accurate description of this book too. Long after I finished reading it, I found myself seeing - and believing - J.D. Salinger horsing around with Ray and Moonlight Graham in a darkened ball park in Minnesota. And I decided that Salinger must be a far more likable man than his anchorite image would attest. I throbbed with the pain visited on the reputation of Joe Jackson and reveled in the pleasure he could now find on his nightly return to the cornfield diamond. And I understood - passionately - what Ray meant when his identical twin, Richard, no baseball fan, came to the cornfield and saw no diamond, saw no Black Sox, saw no Moonlight Graham, while Ray and Salinger and Kid Scissons sat enthralled: "Richard's eyes," Ray said, "are blind to the magic."

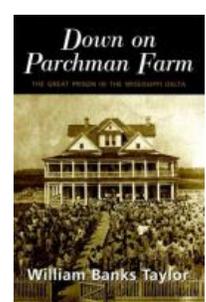
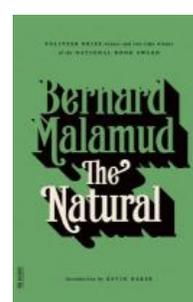
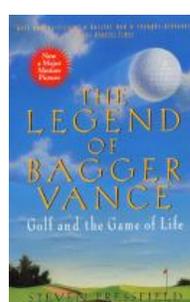
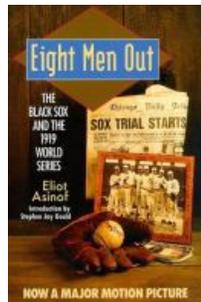
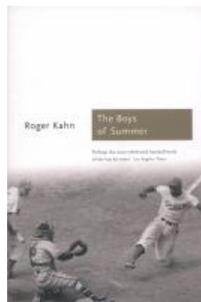
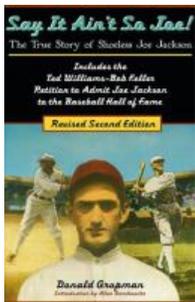
W.P. Kinsella, gazing at baseball, sees the magic plain.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Why do you suppose Ray isn't the first to see the men on the field? What does it mean that his daughter, Karin, is the first one to notice them?
- 2) J.D. Salinger, a reclusive author, has a significant role in this story. Why do you think the author chose Salinger? Could the story have been told with a different author in that place?
- 3) How do you feel about Shoeless Joe and the Hall of Fame? Should he be there? Why or why not?
- 4) This story was originally not a full novel, but instead a short story. The author was urged by a publisher to turn it into a full novel. Do you think the same story could have been told in a 20-page short story? How would it have been different?
- 5) Ray Kinsella heard a voice telling him to build a baseball field. Would you have turned your crop into a field based on a voice? Have you ever followed a feeling or a voice and done something unusual? If so, would you do it again? Is the story trying to teach us something about ourselves?

- 6) Baseball was our “national past time,” but in more recent years it’s been eclipsed by other sports. Why is the Super Bowl so much more of an event where people get together to watch than the World Series? What has changed about our culture and what have we lost as a result?
- 7) *Shoeless Joe* mentions outstanding ball players who never achieve fame or name recognition in the Major Leagues. The character Moonlight Graham says he knew he was outclassed when he played his one game in the majors. Yet, he was one of the players destined to play on Ray’s field. Ray’s father, who never made it out of the minors, is another. What is the author saying about baseball as a career, versus baseball as a passion? What makes a player great?
- 8) If you watched the movie adaptation *Field of Dreams* what struck you the most about the differences between the film and the book?
- 9) How would you sell this book to friend who is not a baseball fan?

Further Reading



***Say It Ain't So Joe* by Donald Gropman**

This is a readable, well-researched biography of Shoeless Joe Jackson. The author argues that Jackson had no involvement in the Black Sox scandal of 1919..

***The Boys of Summer* by Roger Kahn**

This is a classic piece of baseball writing. Kahn grew up as a fan of the Brooklyn Dodgers, and, as a young journalist, he traveled with the team in 1952 and 1953. His memoir includes poignant accounts of the lives of the players after their playing days were over.

***Eight Men Out* by Eliot Asinof**

The most comprehensive investigation of the famous scandal, the fixing of the 1919 World Series, covering events from the first meetings between White Sox players and gamblers to the 1921 trial and its aftermath. It makes for a vivid and exciting read.

The Legend of Bagger Vance by Steven Pressfield

This book does for golf what Shoeless Joe did for baseball. It's a novel about golf that also presents golf as a metaphor for life, for which it draws on the religious philosophy of the classic Indian text, the Bhagavad Gita.

The Natural by Bernard Malamud

Some critics regard *The Natural*, by Bernard Malamud (1952), as the greatest baseball novel ever written. The main character, Roy Hobbs, is a composite of Joe Jackson, Babe Ruth, and Eddie Waitkus; his bat, Wonderboy, is a refashioning of Jackson's famous bat, called Black Betsy

For more suggestions access NoveList Plus at to www.tscpl.org under the "research it" tab.

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