

Father and son share special journey in new book

BY KATHY DAY

Major League Baseball players know road trips, hotel rooms and being away from family.

Mike Luery and his son Matt do, too, only they skipped the being away from each other during the years they trekked all around the country to 32 different ballparks.

Mike, an investigative reporter for television's CBS13 in Sacramento, has taken his love of the game and of writing and put the two together in "Baseball Between Us — 16 Years, 32 BallParks, 43,000 miles." And Matt, who was 5 when the adventure began and is now a 23-year-old architecture student at USC, contributed the epilogue.

On March 24, Mike was in San Diego signing books and talking about the lessons learned. He also talked about them in a recent interview.

Those lessons are an intermingling of parenting and the game.

"Both involve rules — you break a rule, you answer to the boss, whether it's the parent or the manager," he said.

And one of the big advantages to ball games is the

'Baseball Between Us'

■ \$17.95

■ Available at www.baseballbetweenus.com, Barnes & Noble, Amazon.

■ Also on the website, download the first two chapters or read Mike's blogs about baseball.

time between innings when you can talk even if you're having a rough spot — and there were a few of those along the road for the father-son duo.

There was the time when Matt decided to call his father "Mike" instead of Dad, telling him it was "an old-fashioned concept so get used to it."

Here's how the conversation ended, as revealed in the book: "Being a dad is a lifetime deal. It doesn't end when your son turns 18 or even 21. So I told Matt, "Show me a little respect," adding, "Your old man isn't

senile and knows a thing or two about life."

"How about just saying, 'Sure Dad', I asked with a gleam of hope in my eye.

"OK Mike," was the response.

And after a couple of days, it went away, Mike said.

And there were lighter days like the one in Toronto when Matt offered to buy his dad a beer.

"I said, "You're not even 21," Mike said.

Matt responded: "Guess what, this is Canada."

So there they sat in the Sky Dome, drinking a Molson.

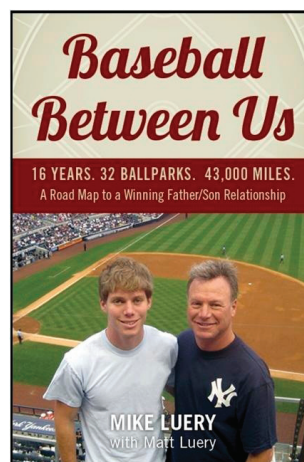
As they talked, Matt told him the "best part was not having to use my fake ID."

A couple of years later, in Anaheim, they shared an American beer.

"It was a real rite of passage," Mike said.

Growing up in Connecticut, Mike was a big Yankees fan and he too bonded with his dad over baseball, he said.

The two saw his team face off against the Dodgers in the 1963 World Series — when baseball was played in the daytime. "But they didn't win," he recalled.



"Sandy Koufax struck out 15, including my hero Mickey Mantle two times. I cried all the way home."

That memory, he said, was part of the inspiration for passing the torch to his son. The first road trip was paired up with business trip to St. Louis. Matt and his sister Sarah, now 25 and a graduate student at Cal State Northridge, went with their dad to see the Cardinals play.

"I'm very blessed," Mike said. "My wife is very supportive — she is one of those who says watching baseball is like watching paint dry."

And he acknowledges Sarah "is a little bit into base-

ball," but hasn't been on many of the road trips. So mostly it was just the boys.

When Mike was 16, they flew to Detroit and saw the Tigers in the new Comerica Park, then drove to Chicago to see the White Sox and then to Milwaukee to see the Brewers.

That wasn't quite the end of it, though. Off they went to see the Dakotas — one the things on Mike's "bucket list" was to visit every state, so they knocked off two more, all while getting to meet Maury Wills, the Dodgers' legendary shortstop and stolen base king. They also visited a museum paying tribute to him and another museum honoring legendary Yankee Roger Maris in, of all places, a Fargo, N.D., shopping mall.

Mike's own favorite memory was being in San Francisco when Barry Bonds hit his 715th home run and broke Babe Ruth's record, Mike said. "Even with the steroid controversy, it was the most electric moment. The entire stadium erupted, jets flew overhead, there were fireworks and confetti."

Mike can talk for hours about baseball, the parks, and what he and his son have learned along the way,

from why the World Series should be moved back to daytime starts to how to be an effective father.

One of the best lessons, he said is "how dynamic the father-son relationship is and how it evolves."

For Matt, who's still occasionally joining his dad for a road trip — the last one was in 2010 but they're hoping to make it to the Marlins' new park in Miami this year — the memories are strong too.

His epilogue tells his side of the story. Here's a sampling:

"Learning not only about my dad's strength, like his political knowledge, but also his weaknesses, like his sense of direction, has made our relationship stronger and more equal; he certainly knows all of my faults from 22 years of raising me. And I'm proud that we can relate to each other well enough now to be able to joke around — just like I do with my friends. I also admire my dad for being able to put up with me constantly challenging his authority throughout the trip. Based on what my aunt and uncle have told me in recent years though, it seems the fruit doesn't fall far from the tree."

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